APRIL
35c

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Shadow of the Guillotine
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

The Cigarette of Death
by HUGH WILEY

The Seven Curses
by SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

Chocolates for Miss Pinhorn
by MICHAEL INNES

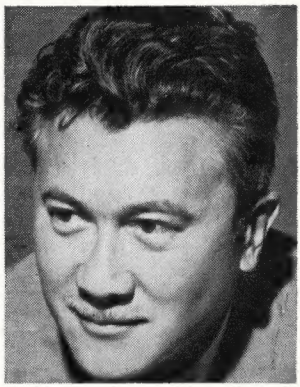
The Blonde Nurse
by THOMAS WALSH

THE SPORTING CHANCE

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



During the last war, when no newspaper was complete without its military analyst, one of the most widely read of these special columnists was Major George Fielding Eliot.

Most of the sober-sided citizens who followed his syndicated commentaries day after day would never have dreamed that in between wars this distinguished commentator had long been one of our most prolific writers of crime fiction. Much of this ignorance can be attributed to Major Eliot's own modesty, or perhaps to a discreet reluctance to risk being told that nobody who wrote *that* kind of stuff could be a respected critic of global strategy and tactics, for most of his fiction was written under other names.

So it is with special pride that we bring you George Fielding Eliot in his own name and right this month with SHADOW OF THE GUILLOTINE —which, though it reads like exciting fiction, happens to be as factual as anything he ever wrote as a war correspondent.

As a direct contrast to this, THE SEVEN CURSES by Samuel Hopkins Adams is for true connoisseurs of melodrama, complete with sinister house and all the trimmings. A truly top-notch spine-chiller.

In the Oriental school of detection, Charlie Chan and Mr. Moto are perhaps the two practitioners who first spring to the average reader's mind. But their fame should not detract from the individual ingenuity of Hugh Wiley's character James Lee, who is here with us to investigate THE CIGARETTE OF DEATH.

CHOCOLATES FOR MISS PINHORN is a neatly turned job of deduction by Britain's well known Michael Innes; while for a Transatlantic counterpart Thomas Walsh gives us one of his masterly New York cop interpretations in the affair of THE BLONDE NURSE.

The modesty I love to brag about forbids me to say too much about my own new Saint story, THE SPORTING CHANCE. But I can without bashfulness mention one interesting innovation which it contains.

In the early part of this story, it is necessary for the Saint to ask questions about a certain situation in Japan. So whom does he consult? Why, obviously, Master Sergeant Johnson of the Office of Special Investigations, and Inspector Geichi Nikkiyama of the Tokyo Metropolitan. For, as is well known to all readers who have enjoyed Walt Sheldon's stories in this magazine, nobody knows more than these two about what is cooking in Nippon.

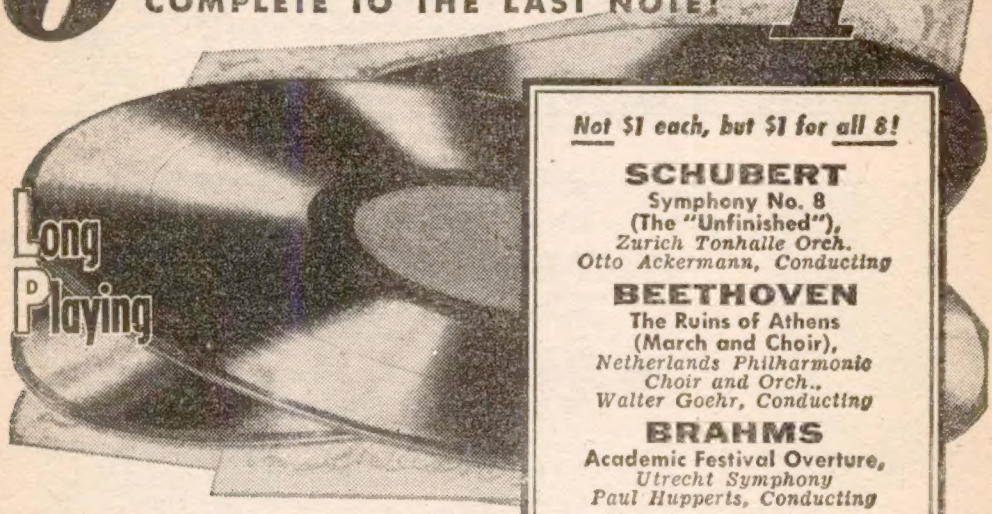
If this sparks a new fad of characters stepping across story lines to meet each other, let me take the blame for starting it.

Leslie Charteris

LONG-PLAYING (33⅓ R.P.M.) HI-FIDELITY

8 MASTERPIECES $1.00

COMPLETE TO THE LAST NOTE!



Not $1 each, but $1 for all 8!

SCHUBERT
Symphony No. 8
(The "Unfinished"),
Zurich Tonhalle Orch.
Otto Ackermann, Conducting

BEETHOVEN
The Ruins of Athens
(March and Choir),
Netherlands Philharmonic
Choir and Orch.,
Walter Goehr, Conducting

BRAHMS
Academic Festival Overture,
Utrecht Symphony
Paul Hupperts, Conducting

MOZART
Piano Concerto in E Flat, K 107
Artur Balsam, piano,
Winterthur Symphony Orch.,
Otto Ackermann, Conducting

BACH
Toccata and Fugue in D Minor,
A. Schreiner; Organ of the
Tabernacle, Salt Lake City

WAGNER
Die Meistersinger, Prelude, Act 1,
Zurich Tonhalle Orch.,
Otto Ackermann, Conducting

DUKAS
Sorcerer's Apprentice,
Utrecht Symphony
Paul Hupperts, Conducting

MOUSSORGSKY
Night on Bald Mountain,
Netherlands Philharmonic
Walter Goehr, Conducting

No Strings Attached!

No Need to Buy Any Other Records Ever!
Full Advantages of Trial Membership

ALL 8 masterpieces for only $1. Performed by world-famous artists. Custom-recorded on purest vinyl. Reproduced with a tonal fidelity encompassing the *entire range of human hearing* (50 to 15,000 cycles). This amazing offer is made only to demonstrate superb quality of our recordings; and to show you advantages of trial membership.

HOW CLUB OPERATES—We advise you monthly of new releases. Those you want are sent you for FREE trial. After 5 days' listening—*only* the records you decide to keep are billed you at the low membership price of $1.50 per disc (average playing time 40 min.). You save ⅔ the usual retail price! This "give-away" offer can obviously not be kept open indefinitely. MAIL COUPON NOW while supply lasts. Full money-back guarantee.

The Musical Masterpiece Society, Inc., Dept. 955
43 West 61st Street, New York 23, N. Y.

Enclosed is $1 in *full* payment for the recordings of 8 masterpieces listed. Enroll me as trial member. Privileges: No purchase obligation *ever!* Advance notice of releases. 5 day free trial on any discs. I may reject records before or after receipt; may cancel membership at any time. For *future* l.p. discs I keep, I'll pay only $1.50 each plus shipping.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Canada, *address: 686 Bathurst St., Toronto 4, Ont.*

THE saint
DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1955
VOL. 3, NO. 4

The Sporting Chance 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Chocolates for Miss Pinhorn 33
by MICHAEL INNES

The Blonde Nurse 40
by THOMAS WALSH

Shadow of the Guillotine 55
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

Frontier Fracas 70
by STEPHEN W. POLLAK

The Look-Out Man 75
by NICOLAS BENTLEY

The Cigarette of Death 82
by HUGH WILEY

The Seven Curses 93
by SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

Three Sovereigns for a Corpse 104
by E. R. PUNSHON

The Secret Place of Murder 111
by HAROLD MONTANYE

Missing Person 158
by AUSTIN ROBERTS

H. L. Herbert
President

Leo Margulies
Publisher
Editorial Director

Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 3, No. 4. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscriptions 6 issues $2.00, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright 1955, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. April 1955.
PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Easy Way

Ex-Smokers Say Safe,
New Medical Tablet Discovery

BREAKS SMOKING HABIT IN 7 SHORT DAYS!

STOP Shortening Your Life Span

REPUTABLE DOCTOR, making clinical tests, found Smoke-No-Mor effective in more than 80% of cases tested. Today more than 200,000 people have used Smoke-No-Mor to curb the unhealthy, expensive tobacco habit!

ENDORSED!

Delighted Men and Women from Coast to Coast Express Their Appreciation

Your results may vary. Most certainly Smoke-No-Mor merits your trial and approval. Following letters are on file and may be read at any time.

CRAVING DISAPPEARED ON SECOND DAY

"I had smoked for twenty-five years and two packs of cigarettes a day. After the second day the craving disappeared and now for several months I don't even miss the cigarettes."
Mr. J. W. C., Fresno, California

HUSBAND STOPS COUGHING, GAINS WEIGHT

"I ordered Smoke-No-Mor for my husband about two months ago and he hasn't smoked since starting to take the tablets. Now he has stopped coughing and has started to regain his normal weight. You can imagine how much we save—he used to smoke two packs of cigarettes a day."
Mrs. D. C. R., Donalsonville, Ga.

LOSES BURNING IN STOMACH AND THROAT

"I had been smoking for about 49 years and to my surprise after the third day I had lost my taste for cigarettes and at the same time I had lost the burning in my stomach and throat and my mouth tastes like a new mouth."
Mr. J. S., Birmingham, Ala.

GOES TO SLEEP WITHOUT TOSSING

"Four tablets of Smoke-No-Mor were all it required to stop my smoking habit. I feel 100% better than I have for years and it is a pleasant relief to go to sleep at night without tossing, turning and waking up to reach out for a cigarette."
Sgt. W. K., Fort Meade, Md.

MORE THAN YOU CLAIM FOR IT

"For seven years I had been an unwilling victim of the smoking habit. No matter what I tried I could never lose the desire to smoke. Thanks a million times for Smoke-No-Mor, it has been unbelievable, the next thing to a miracle. I am a living example to prove that Smoke-No-Mor is more than you claim for it."
Mrs. M. C., Springfield, Ohio

Pleasant, Safe Anti-Smoking Tablet Can End Tobacco Craving In A Week!

QUIT SMOKING!

Lengthen Your Life Span—Save $200 a Year!

One week from today—you can lick that habit of smoking. You can stop smoking cigarettes, cigars . . . quit using tobacco in any form. Then say goodbye to smokers' cough, jittery nerves, irritation of nose and throat, loss of appetite, and other ailments caused by tobacco. You'll feel ever so much better, you'll look better and, chances are, you'll even live longer. Whoever called cigarettes "coffin nails" made no mistake.

Already thousands and thousands of men and women have broken the dangerous expensive habit of smoking, this simpler, easier way with Smoke-No-Mor tablets. It makes no difference how long you've been smoking or how much you smoke. It makes no difference how many times you've tried to quit smoking but couldn't. The very first package of sensational Smoke-No-Mor must curb your craving for tobacco in seven short days, even less or money back. It's pleasant-tasting—and it's medically-approved for safety and results! Don't expect filters to do more than cool the smoke. To be rid of the danger, you've got to quit smoking. Mail coupon.

Prove It To Yourself

See the Poisons in Tobacco That Impair Your Health—By Making This 3-Step Test!

1. Light pipe, cigarette or cigar and take a big puff. Get out your handkerchief or a piece of Kleenex and hold tightly in front of your lips. Filter tip cigarettes make no difference whatsoever.
2. Don't inhale, but blow a puff of tobacco smoke right through cloth or tissue—then look! You see tars, nicotine, and impurities that impair your health!
3. Repeat 2 but this time inhale. See how all the tars and poisons have stayed in your lungs! If you could see the insides of your lungs, you'd quit smoking!

After making this test, you'll see with your own eyes the impurities in a single puff of tobacco smoke, most of which goes into your lungs. Imagine what continuous smoking — pack after pack — year after year — does to your body. Stop the life-shortening smoking habit this very week — before it's too late!

ORDER NOW

Your health . . . your very life . . . may depend on quick use of Smoke-No-Mor. Use the coupon today.

The hacking, wheezing, coughing of the heavy smoker is called SMOKER'S RESPIRATORY SYNDROME! Shortness of breath and constriction in the throat and upper air passages are always present. Severe cases may be mistaken for bronchial asthma. The fiery red throat, covered with discharge, is so typical the physician recognizes it immediately as smokers throat.

GUARANTEED TO CURB SMOKING URGE

If you really want to stop or cut down smoking, we are so sure Smoke-No-Mor can help you that we make this unconditional guarantee: If, after using one single package of Smoke-No-Mor as directed, you feel they have not made it possible for you to stop or cut down smoking to your satisfaction within 7 days, simply return the empty box for refund of the full purchase price.

How to order SMOKE-NO-MOR

Send no money! Just fill out coupon and mail. Upon arrival of Smoke-No-Mor, pay the postman just $3.00, plus regular C.O.D. postage, on the iron-clad unconditional guarantee they must rid you of the tobacco habit—or your money back! Send for amazing Smoke-No-Mor tablets today!

Mail Coupon TODAY!

ERWELL PHARMACAL COMPANY Dept. SDI
400 Madison Ave., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Please send me amazing Smoke-No-Mor. Upon arrival, I will pay the postman $3.00 plus regular C.O.D. postage, on the unconditional guarantee that they must curb the tobacco urge to my satisfaction—or my money back. (Send $3.00 with this order and we pay postage.)

NAME_____
(PRINT PLAINLY)

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ ZONE_____ STATE_____

the sporting chance

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Crime's lengthening shadow may dull the sheen of a rainbow trout. Templar's quarry was speckled red, and bigger than any game fish.

COWICHAN LAKE was a sheet of silver under a cloudless sky that was slowly warming into blue after the recent pallor of dawn, but rising trout were still dimpling the glassy sheen of the water. Simon Templar had already caught three of them, and four of that size were as many as he wanted for his lunch: he didn't want to kill one more fish than he could use at that moment, and so he was in no hurry to end his sport by taking the last one. He was really working on the perfection of his cast now rather than trying to take a fish, waiting for a rise no less than twenty yards away from his boat and then trying to place his fly in the exact center of the spreading concentric ripples on the surface, as if in the bullseye of a target.

Somewhere in the distance, so faint at first that it seemed to come from no actual direction, he heard the hum of an airplane engine.

There was nothing intrinsically noteworthy about the sound. Simon permitted himself a moment of detached philosophical astonishment at the random reflection that there could be hardly a corner of the globe left by

THE SAINT THRUSTS A TORCH AT THE RED FACE OF DANGER IN AN EXCITING SAGA OF A WILDERNESS SELDOM VISITED

that time where the sound of an airplane overhead would attract any general attention; in such a few years had man's domain extended to the stratosphere, and so easily had the miracle been taken for granted. Up there in the heart of Vancouver Island beyond the end of the last trail that could be called a road, a plane was merely commonplace, the most simple and obvious vehicle to convey prospectors, timber surveyors, hunters and fishermen to the remote destinations of their choice. The fantastic contraption of the Wright Brothers had become the horse and buggy of their grandchildren.

A nice sixty feet away, a young uncomplicated rainbow rose lazily to ingurgitate some insect that had fallen on the surface. Simon picked the tiny vortex of its inhalation as his next mark, and his rod rose and flipped forward again in a flowing rhythm. The line curled and snaked out like a graceful gossamer whip, and at the end of it the artificial fly settled on the water as airily as a tuft of thistledown.

The young trout, perhaps pardonably thinking it had left something unfinished, must have turned in its own length to rectify the omission. The fly went under in another little swirl, and instantly Simon set the hook. He felt his line become taut and alive, and the fish somersaulted into the air, the blade of its body shimmering in the clear morning light.

The drone of the plane had grown rapidly louder, and it seemed to the Saint's sensitive ear that there was a kind of syncopated unevenness in its pulse. Almost as soon as he had localized it somewhere behind him and to his left it was bearing down lower, but he was too busy for the moment to turn and look at it. For a few minutes he was entirely absorbed in balancing the vigor of the fish against the strength of a filament that one sharp tug would have snapped.

The struggle of the fish came through the fragile line and limber rod all the way into his hand, as if he were linked to it by an extended nerve. And the airplane engine roared in an approaching crescendo and then suddenly stopped, but the rush of its wings through the air went on, coming closer still, blending with the whine of a dead propeller and punctuated by an occasional spastic hiccup of erratic combustion. It wooshed over his head suddenly like a gigantic bird, seeming to swoop so low over him that involuntarily he ducked and crouched lower in the boat.

That momentary distraction and the slack that it put into his line were all that the spunky young trout needed. It was gone, with a last flashing leap, to await some other rendezvous with destiny; and Simon ruefully

reeled in an unresisting hook as the cause of the trouble touched down a little further on, striking two plumes of spray from the water with its skimming pontoons.

He laid his rod down and lighted a cigarette, looking the seaplane over in more detail as it coasted towards the nearby shore. It was painted a dark gray that was almost black, its lines were not those of any make that he could identify, and it seemed to carry no identification numbers or insignia of any kind—he made those basic observations in approximately that sequence, although in less sharply punctuated compartments than the summary suggests.

Also it had definite engine trouble, as had been hinted by the irregular thrumming sounds of its approach and the bronchitic coughs it had emitted as it glided down. Now the propeller was turning again, making strained uneven revolutions with recoils and pauses in between: the pilot was forcing it with the starter, but the motor refused to fire. Already the seaplane had lost the momentum of its landing speed; it needed power to steer and taxi even on the water, but it was not producing any, and a breeze that had barely started to ripple the smoothness of the lake was beginning to waft it sideways in undignified but inexorable impotence.

The plexiglass canopy opened, and the pilot squirmed out and wriggled down on to one of the pontoons. He reached under into a trapdoor in the plane's sternum and hauled out a light anchor with a line already attached and let it drop with a splash, and presently the plane stopped drifting and slewed around at the end of the line with its nose pointed aloofly at the playful zephyr.

The pilot stood on the pontoon and looked around with a kind of studied nonchalance, almost pointedly refraining from more than a glance in the direction of Simon Templar in his skiff. It was as if he intended to disclaim in advance even the suggestion of an appeal for help—as if, in fact, he would have denied that anything was wrong.

If that was the way he wanted it, Simon was in no hurry either. He snipped off the fly which the escaped trout had mauled severely in the tussle, and concentrated profoundly over the selection of another from the assortment in his pocket case. Finally he settled on one with gray hackles, a red body, and a yellow-brown wisp of tail, and began to tie it on to his leader with leisured care.

There was no outward change in his demeanor, any more than there is any visible change in the exterior of a radio when it is switched on. But already the mysterious circuits which had made the Saint what he was had awak-

ened to silently busy life, telling him with dispassionate certainty that even in those last few moments, with no more overt symptoms than the facts which have just been narrated, the delicate tendrils of adventure had made contact with him again, even in that placid Shangri-La of the Northwest.

From the city of Vancouver on the west coast of Canada it was two hours and a quarter by ferry to Nanaimo on the east coast of Vancouver Island; from Nanaimo it was a roundabout sixty miles to where the Cowichan Lake road ended at the Youbou lumber settlement; beyond that, it was almost ten more miles by boat to the cove near the northwest tip of the lake where Simon Templar had been fly-casting when the gray-black seaplane swooped down to shatter the peace of the spring morning with its spluttering engine and drag him rudely back out of his own brief moment of tranquillity. Even there at the very edge of outright wilderness, it seemed, the Saint's destiny could not spare him for long. Adventure was still as near as it had ever been. It was only up to him whether he should answer or ignore its beckoning finger.

But of course it was no accident that the invitation met with him there. The first pass had been made weeks ago, on the other side of the Pacific.

II

At the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, Major Vernon Ascony, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, said: "It isn't coming through here, old boy. If it were, I couldn't help getting a whiff of it. I personally don't believe it's even coming from India. From what I hear, the new governments of India and Pakistan have pretty well snuffed it out. And I don't think it's coming down from Indo-China either. We'd have been bound to find a link somewhere along the route. I just don't think it's our pidgin at all.

"But you can't tell that to the international bigwigs. They're still stuck with the ideas they got from Fu Manchu. Drugs are peddled by sinister Orientals; Singapore is one of the Orient's gateways; therefore this must be one of the ports it clears from. So when an unusual amount of the stuff turns up in Los Angeles or Toronto, this here is one of the most likely places it came from. Then everyone wants to know why *I* don't bloody well personally put a stop to it."

The Saint smiled.

"A policeman's lot is not a happy one," he murmured. "Could that be set to music, or has someone already done it?"

"Don't be too disappointed if someone got ahead of you, old chap. At least you've done more

than almost anyone else to make it true."

"Have I given you any trouble?"

"No. But I'm jolly well keeping my fingers crossed till your plane takes off . . . Seriously, old man," Ascony said, "why don't you do something about it? I don't mind telling you, when I was a bit younger you were quite a hero of mine. *You* know, the Robin Hood of modern crime, the knight in shining armor—all that sort of rot. A lot of us in England used to think of you like that, when we read about you in the papers. But lately, you seem to have become rather different."

"The world has become a little different too," said the Saint.

"I know. And I'm sure that everything you've been doing has been important enough, in its own way. But I can't help wishing that once in a while you'd take on something more like the old times, I mean some simple racket that we all understand and agree about, and do it up good and proper without making a dollar out of it for yourself, just because it ought to be done. Like this dope racket, for instance."

"You're not a boy now," said the Saint, almost harshly. "You're a policeman. You know how big and complicated the dope racket is. You know how many man-hours and dollars, how many elaborate organizations in how many countries, are trying to fight it. But you just want me to fix it all by myself, by tracking down one dastardly master-mind and punching him in the nose."

"Yes, of course I know it isn't so simple. But there actually is a flood of dope reaching North America on a bigger scale than it ever did before. Anyhow, that's what I gather from the memoranda that end up on my desk. Well, a thing like that *could* have one simple source, which a fellow like yourself might be able to dig out, if he was lucky. You get around a lot. I suppose I'm talking out of turn. But I wish you'd try."

Simon Templar frowned at the beading of dew on his stengah glass. It was a long time since he had been reminded of certain truths as bluntly as Major Ascony's incongruously genuine eagerness had stated them.

"Maybe I'll have to do that," he said darkly.

And by the next morning he might have preferred to forget the easy boast; only some of the backwash of memories that had stung it out of him would not be so easily dismissed.

But in Hong Kong, Inspector Stephen Hao said: "If it's coming from Red China, it isn't shipped from here. Would you like to see how we search everybody who comes in from the mainland these days? After we get through frisking 'em, five thousand of 'em couldn't be car-

rying enough dope to give an addict one good fix. Why don't you look around in Japan?"

But in Tokyo, at his favorite *tempura* restaurant on Yodobashi Avenue, Master Sergeant Ben Johnson of the Office of Special Investigations, said: "Sure, the Secret Service and the FBI have been riding our tails about it for months. They know that most of the supply these days is moving from west to east, from the Pacific Coast. But I'll swear it isn't coming from Nippon. Hell, we've got it licked here to the point where the domestic traffic is about ready to die from starvation, and the prices are out of sight. So where would anyone find that sort of quantity to export? What do you say, Nikki?"

Inspector Geichi Nikkiyama, of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, nodded owlishly over a fried shrimp bearded with golden batter.

"Ah, so. More likely criminal technician in United States having discovered how to make synthetic dope in bathtub, like so profitable Prohibition gin."

But in San Francisco, in Johnny Kan's restaurant on Grant Avenue, as the Saint dipped his chopsticks into a dish of *tung gee bok opp,* a succulent squab marinated in exotic spices and rose liqueur and dressed with a quite improbable sauce, Johnny told him: "If I were you, I'd go on up to Vancouver. From what I hear, that's the easiest place to get it in all North America. If my name was Charlie Chan, I'd deduce that where it's most plentiful would be the place nearest the source. I'd like to see you do something about it, Saint."

"So would I," said the Saint. "And it can't be much harder than catching hold of a rainbow."

"You might look into that too, while you're up there," Johnny Kan said confusingly.

Simon figured that some minor idiomatic cog had slipped somewhere between them, but wrote it off as not worth a laborious exploration. Yet for the first time he felt that he might be getting warm, and in Vancouver he made no more direct inquiries.

Most of what he did there would make rather tedious storytelling, except for certain individuals who might have nefarious motives for a too detailed curiosity about the Saint's methods. It was quite a few years since the Saint had last slipped into the underworld and disappeared without a ripple, like an otter into a dark pool; but he did it as easily as if the last of the old days had been yesterday, and none of the persons he moved among during that time ever dreamed who it was that had passed through their stealthy lives more stealthily than their utmost caution could conceive.

He forgot all about Johnny

Kan's bland *non sequitur* until one day in the devious labyrinths he followed there was the echo of a name, Julius Pavan, and with it a reference to what seemed to be a stock joke about Mr. Pavan's passion for fishing. And at long last a bell had rung as Simon remembered that among truly dedicated fishermen the word "rainbow" primarily suggests a species of fish, the rainbow trout, after which the lightning phenomenon in the sky may possibly have been named.

And so a hint and a hunch had eventually led him to where he had just seen a seaplane of unfamiliar design and with no identification markings landing on the waters where Mr. Pavan fished; and now it all seemed as clear and sure as Fate.

III

At the edge of the pines on the north shore of the cove there was a log cabin no bigger than a double garage. It was the only sign of human habitation within sight of that remote corner of the lake. It was crudely but solidly built of hand-hewn timber, and mellowed into the landscape with the weathering of many seasons. Perhaps some trapper of a generation ago had built it for his headquarters, before the swaths cut by commercial logging had driven the game even further back into the dwindling wilderness. But now it was the fishing camp of Julius Pavan, who lived alone in a big house in the heights of West Vancouver, and drove a big car and invested in buildings and real estate.

A man in a red plaid shirt and drab trousers came out of it and hurried down to a rough floating dock where a small motor-boat was tied up. He cast off and cranked it up and chugged across to the seaplane at an unspectacular but useful speed.

He stopped the boat beside the pontoon where the pilot stood, and the pilot got in. There was some discussion or explanation or argument, in which the pilot took the more gesticulatory part. Presently the pilot climbed up on the short foredeck, and from that elevation managed to open a cowling over the plane's single engine, while the man in the plaid shirt steadied the motor-boat by holding on to the plane's propeller. The pilot peered and probed lengthily into the engine's innards, and finally closed the cowling again and lowered himself back down into the boat with another outburst of gestures.

The man in the plaid shirt shrugged, and cranked his motor again, and the boat swung around and headed back towards the dock below the lonely cabin.

Their course took them within fifty yards of the Saint, and both men looked at him as they went by. But neither of them waved a

casual greeting as is the friendly custom of the backwoods; and the Saint, having left it to them to make the advance, did not belatedly take the initiative. When they had finished looking at him, they returned to their private discussion; and with reciprocal indifference to their existence and their problems, Simon Templar plucked his fly from the water where it had been resting and freshened it a little with a couple of false casts and sent it floating downwind towards another imaginary target.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watched the motor-boat tie up at the dock, and the two men get out and walk up to the cabin and go in.

Simon decided to allow himself just three more casts, each to be made and properly fished without unseemly haste. Through one circumstance and another, several summers had gone by since he last practiced that pinpoint accuracy with a trout rod, and he was ingenuously delighted to discover that his wrist had lost little of its cunning. But on another level of his mind those three casts were only a convenient way of estimating a period of time which he felt he should let go by, and simultaneously a way of occupying the time which might lull any suspicions of the two men who were now in the cabin, if perchance they were still keeping him under observation.

His third cast happened to be the first to fall several inches wide of its mark, but he disciplined himself sternly against the temptation to try just one more. He picked the line up on the reel, secured the fly, and put the rod down with the resigned air of a man who has decided to concede a temporary triumph to the caprices of the finny tribe. He even moulded exactly the right expression on his face, just in case he might be playing to an audience equipped with powerful binoculars.

As a matter of fact the sun had risen high enough by that time to send the fish down to cooler and shadier depths, and the rises had stopped almost as if some piscine curfew had sounded. It was a perfectly normal and convincing time for any angler to pack up until the evening.

Simon hauled up his anchor, moved back to the stern seat, and pulled the starter of his outboard.

It was one of the new silent models which were just then beginning to reduce the traditional machine-gun racket of outboard motors to little more than a horrible memory. It came to life with no more obtrusive a purr than an expensive automobile, but the skiff shot away as if springs had uncoiled behind it. And because of this epoch-making mechanical improvement, which made it impossible for anyone to trace his course and

progress by ear, he was able to turn the skiff in towards the shore and cut the engine the moment he had passed the first promontory that shut off the cabin from his view, with complete assurance that the men in the cabin would hear nothing to suggest what he had done.

He let the skiff glide the last few yards under a steeply sloping bank, and moored it to a tree on which he also swung himself ashore. He climbed the slope at an easy slant and came to the top of a low ridge. From there he could look down to the waters of the cove which he had just left, and the seaplane riding at anchor further out on the lake. The roof of the log cabin was below him, almost hidden among the trees.

The same trees and bushes provided a perfect screen for his approach, and he moved between them as silently and invisibly as any Indian ever crept upon a pioneer's homestead. He only had to expose himself in the very last eight feet, and those he covered in a low crouching leap that brought him up against the widest span of blank wall on that side and still kept him well under window level. The maneuver seemed even excessively cautious, for he felt quite sure that anyone in the cabin who was keeping a lookout at all would be watching the approach from the lake and not the back of the building.

Rising flat against the wall, he slid along it to the nearest window and with infinite care raised one eye just above the sill in one bottom corner of the opening.

The inside of the cabin was one big room for sleeping, living, and cooking, with the black iron wood-burning range which is standard equipment in the Northwest placed squarely and starkly in one corner. Other amenities, however, had been introduced to alleviate the Spartan simplicity in which the original builder had probably lived. There was a good carpet on the floor, a modern radio-phonograph in another corner, chrome-tube chairs with plastic-covered rubber cushions at the big all-purpose table, and a couple of big luxurious-looking armchairs with gay chintz slip covers. The pilot of the seaplane sat in one of them, gazing out at the lake through the opposite window.

The sleeping accommodation consisted of double-decker bunks built against the wall at one end of the room. Peering around at an acute angle, Simon could see about half the structure. But what he saw was the half where the girl sat.

She would have been no more than twenty-five, he judged, if you discounted the tired pallor that had sabotaged the young contours of her face. She wore blue jeans and a form-fitting cardigan that plainly sculptured youthful curves of hip and waist and

breast. Her short hair was midnight black but her eyes were clear blue like mountain lakes. She sat on the lower bunk and leaned against one of the smooth posts that supported the upper berth, with her cheek resting against it and one arm wrapped around it. As she wore it the attitude had an unconsciously pathetic grace, but she could not have changed it much if she had wanted to, for her two wrists were handcuffed together where they met in her lap.

He did not see Julius Pavan.

But he heard Pavan say, behind him: "Put your hands up. Don't make any other move, or I'll blow you in half."

IV

"Well, well, well," said the Saint. "Now I know what they mean by overpowering hospitality. Did I really look so lonesome, or were you just desperate for someone to make a fourth at bridge?"

He glanced mildly around the cabin with his hands still in the air, and Pavan kicked the door shut behind him without taking his repeating shotgun out of the Saint's spine.

"Just as I figured," Pavan said. "He ran his boat around the point and got out and came sneaking over the hill. All I had to do was stand still in the bushes and get the drop on him when he was jammed up against the house, peeking in."

"What did you do that for?" the pilot asked Simon with curious gentleness.

He was under six feet tall, but immensely broad, with the neck and shoulders of a wrestler. His bullet head was covered with blond hair cropped so close that at first sight it looked shaved. He wore blue trousers and a gray turtle-neck sweater that somehow combined to give him a faintly nautical appearance. His age might have been anywhere in the thirties; the hardness of his features made it difficult to guess more accurately. His eyes were yellowish and very pale.

"I thought it would give an opening to anyone who wanted to ask silly questions," said the Saint.

"Search him, Igor," Pavan said impatiently. "I don't want to have to hold this gun on him all day."

The pilot ambled closer and passed his big hands competently over the Saint's body. He showed no surprise at the automatic which he felt under the Saint's armpit and pulled out from the shoulder holster under Simon's shirt. He checked the action matter-of-factly and stuck the gun in his own hip pocket.

Beyond that, the Saint's pockets yielded only a small amount of money and some cigarettes and matches, which the pilot put on the table, and a wallet, which the

pilot opened and began to browse through.

Pavan's shotgun muzzle prodded the Saint viciously in the kidneys.

"Get over to the bed. Hook your arm around the post, like the girl's is, and put your wrists together."

Simon obeyed. To get his arm around the post he had to put it around the girl's arm as well, and he had to sit on the end of the bunk with his body half turned away from her.

Pavan produced another pair of handcuffs and snapped them deftly on the Saint's wrists. Simon looked down at them with reluctant approval.

"So much faster and safer than tying people up," he murmured. "I've often wondered why you crooks didn't make more use of them."

Pavan stared at him broodingly. Pavan was middle-aged and a little paunchy where the plaid shirt was tucked into his pants. He had lank black hair thinning back from his forehead, a long, swarthy, clean-shaven face, and thin lips clamped around an unlighted cigar. His black eyes measured the Saint for a retort, but debated at unhurried length whether it should be verbal or physical.

"His name is Simon Templar," the pilot announced, from his study of the identification cards in the Saint's wallet.

The name did not seem to mean anything to him; but Simon felt the girl recognized it, without looking at her, in the involuntary tensing of her shoulder where it rested against his, and he saw the reaction that first widened Pavan's eyes for a moment and then started something smoldering in them like hot slag.

Pavan uttered it.

"The Saint!"

"What is that?" asked the pilot.

"He's no cop," Pavan said. His eyes were fastened on the Saint with the unblinking malevolence of a snake's. "He's worse. He's a guy who set out to be the cop and the judge too. He gives out that he hates crime—so that gives him an excuse to commit crimes himself against anyone with a racket. According to some people, this makes him a Robin Hood. According to me, he's just a robber *and* a hood."

"So now that I've been so elegantly introduced," Simon said to the pilot, "what's the rest of your name, Igor?"

"Igor Netchideff," said the pilot amiably.

Simon nodded, and turned his head to the girl.

"Since we're all getting so chummy," he said, "won't you tell me who you are?"

"Marian Kent," she said.

Her voice was low but steady, and he liked the candid appraisal of her gaze.

"Are you trying to pretend you don't know each other?" Pavan snarled.

Simon looked at him and then down to the shotgun, and drawled: "Pappy, I'd be proud to marry her, but I am not the father of her child."

Pavan moved the gun abruptly and hit Simon across the ear with the barrel. Pain and shock stabbed a kaleidoscope of fire through the Saint's brain and for an instant almost dissolved into blackness. As he fought to clear his vision, he heard Netchideff laughing.

"You are upset, Julius," the pilot said. "Two of such people on your trail, so close together—it *is* upsetting. But if what you say about Templar is right, obviously they would not be friends. Now go and bring back Templar's boat, before it may be noticed by some other fisherman."

Pavan put the shotgun down in a corner by the door and went out.

Slowly the sharp agony in the Saint's ear died down to a dull throbbing, and the sequins stopped dancing in front of his eyes.

Netchideff stood at the window gazing out, rubbing his square jaw on his clenched fist, apparently deep in thought.

"How did you get into this?" Simon asked the girl quietly. "Don't answer if it's any help to the enemy."

"They know," she said. "I'm in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

"What—with no horse? No red coat?"

His flippancy was as cool as if they had been making conversation at a cocktail party. Tired and desperate as she must have been, it still managed to bring the wraith of a smile to her lips.

"These days, we're also a Canadian FBI," she said. "And they haven't advertised it, but they've let a few women in. There are cases sometimes when they can do more than men."

"And they tried you on Julius."

"I got a job as his secretary."

"So he'd already been tabbed as the main dope source that everyone's been looking for?"

"Oh, no. It was much more like a wild suspicion. Until I had a couple of lucky breaks, that is. But I guess this unlucky one wipes them out."

"I followed you up from Nanaimo last night," Simon said. "I'd been watching you and wondering about the set-up before that, of course. I saw the two of you pile into his motorboat and push off from the dock where he keeps it, and somehow I felt that something was wrong and that you were scared deep inside. But it was only a feeling, and there were too many facts against trying to get a boat and follow you in the dark. I stopped at a motel and figured I wouldn't

have too much trouble locating you after daybreak. But I'll admit I didn't sleep too well."

"Were you after the same thing that I was?"

He nodded.

"Ever since a bloke in Singapore reminded me how long it was since I last did anything really valuable and altruistic for the human race."

"I was damned scared," she said. There seemed to be so much that they had to tell each other, even though a strange understanding had grown from nowhere between them that made the most skeletal explanations full and sufficient. "I had a sixth sense telling me that something had gone wrong and Pavan was on to me, but I tried to tell myself it was only nerves. This was my first important assignment, and I wanted to be a hero. I figured that if I wasn't being brought here to be murdered, this might be the big break. I just had to take the gamble."

Simon nodded, understandingly.

"What was the reason he gave for bringing you up here?"

"To work on the prospectus of a housing development he's interested in."

"You couldn't possibly have believed that that was all he meant to work on, at least."

"I wasn't afraid of what you're thinking," she said. "This was one of those jobs I mentioned where it was an advantage to be a woman. I have news for you. He's queer."

"That's a switch," said the Saint. "Now you may have to protect me."

They had been ignoring the pilot unconsciously. It didn't seem that anything he heard now could do any more harm, and indeed he had appeared to be completely immersed in his own cogitations. But now they saw him looking at them again with sphinxlike intensity, and became aware that he had never stopped listening.

Suddenly he thumped his chest.

"*I* am not queer," he proclaimed proudly.

"Well, congratulations," said the Saint.

Netchideff stalked closer, with an almost feral compactness of movement for a few steps.

His course trended towards the girl. He stood looking down at her, studying separate details with his pale eyes. Then, as if to confirm his observation, he cupped a hand over one of her breasts.

Marian Kent kicked at him savagely, but he turned skilfully and her foot only struck him in the thigh.

Netchideff slapped her face hard, but by no means with his full strength. Then he put his hands on his hips and roared with laughter.

"You illegitimate son of a louse," said the Saint.

He couldn't kick Netchideff effectively himself because of his position around the corner of the bunk, but he hoped that the pilot might be tempted into a move that would remedy that.

Netchideff regarded him thoughtfully; but then the door opened again and Pavan returned.

Pavan carried the Saint's fly rod and tackle box. He put the tackle box down by the wall and waved the end of the rod up and down, feeling the action of it, before he stood it up in the corner.

"Nice rod," he said. "That's all he had in the boat. He must have rented it from a camp down the lake." His dark eyes shifted from one direction to another, and made certain deductions. "Were they giving you trouble?"

"No." Netchideff laughed again. He moved back to the table, took a cigarette from the Saint's package and lighted it, then looked a second time at the match booklet he had used. "Lake Cowichan Auto Court," he read from it. "That is where he stayed last night."

"Very likely. It looks like one of their boats."

"When will they wonder why he does not come back?"

"Not before dark—and probably not even then."

"Good. Then we do not have to worry all day. I will look after them while you take your boat down the lake and buy the part that will mend the engine of my plane."

Pavan's heavy brows drew together.

"Why me? I don't know anything about engines."

"It is a very simple part. I will write it down for you. It was invented by Russian engineers, but the spies of Henry Ford stole the design from our trucks which they saw in Europe and they now use it in all their cars. That is what it says in my emergency instructions.

Simon exchanged fascinated glances with Marian.

"I'd probably still have to drive to Duncan for it," Pavan said. "And that's another twenty miles."

"But you know the way, and you will know where to go, and no one will wonder about your accent," Netchideff insisted jovially. "You need not be afraid for me. I have been listening to them talk, and I am quite sure they are alone and do not expect any friends to come to rescue them very soon. You should be back in four hours, and I shall not be bored. But that is no reason to waste time, Julius. You will start at once, please."

V

The pilot came back from seeing Pavan off with Simon's three

rainbows dangling on a string. He held them up and admired them.

"This is very nice of you," he said. "I shall enjoy them for lunch."

"I hope you choke on a bone," said the Saint pleasantly.

Netchideff chuckled with great good humor. He could not have made it plainer that he knew that he could afford a robust invulnerability to mere verbiage.

He took the fish to the sink and began to clean them, humming to himself in a rich voice that swallowed up the last receding mutter of the departing motor-boat. He seemed to have forgotten about sex as capriciously as a child might have been distracted from a toy.

Simon tried tentatively to keep it that way.

"I guess it's a lot better than the lunch you'd get on your submarine," he remarked.

The pilot stopped humming.

After a moment he said: "The Russian Navy is the best fed in the world. But did you know I came from a submarine, or did you guess?"

"It was a fairly simple deduction," said the Saint. "Your clothes have a sea-going look. Your seaplane is painted a naval color. But all the insignia and identification marks have been painted out. Therefore you're on a secret mission. Your seaplane is a type that could be launched from a large submarine. The safest craft to come sneaking close enough to this coast to launch it would be a submarine. So I bet on the submarine."

"You are most intelligent."

"The secret mission, of course, isn't so glorious. The great well-fed Russian Navy is bringing supplies to a common dope peddler. But it isn't so easy to deduce why."

"I was told that he had a good organization, and he pays well."

"Does he pay you?"

"Of course not. I do not know how that is done, but I suppose he pays one of our agents here. Then I am told when to make delivery."

"And that doesn't bother you a bit."

"I am a good officer. I do what I am told."

"I forgot, I'm sorry. Where you come from, you're not encouraged to think."

Netchideff had finished cleaning the fish. He washed his hands under the faucet and came towards the Saint, drying them on a dish towel.

"*I* think," he stated complacently. "It is not my business, but I think I know why we supply Pavan. This dope is a popular vice in the bourgeois democracies. It is one of the vices that weakens them. So it is good for us to encourage. Anything that helps to keep you weak is good, because it will be harder for you to

make the attack on us that your Wall Street leaders are planning. And the money we get helps to pay our friends and agents who keep us informed of your imperialist plans. So in all ways this is very good for us."

"I begin to see the advantages," Simon admitted. "Only you can't help getting the aggressive and defensive angles reversed."

Netchideff frowned.

"I do not quite understand that, but what you say is not important anyhow. Because of your bourgeois education, you cannot think clearly and correctly like a Russian."

"But you just said I was most intelligent."

"When you make a correct deduction, you are intelligent. When you repeat capitalist lies, you show that you are too stupid for anything except fishing."

The pilot's eyes drifted towards Marian again.

"Now you're really talking as if you'd been hit on the head with a hammer and sickle," Simon said desperately. "Maybe you invented everything from Ford cars to fleas, but I'll bet there isn't one good fisherman in the whole Soviet Union."

Netchideff turned back to him with a sort of irritated incredulity.

"Now you are merely ridiculous. How do you think we make the caviar that even your Wall Street bankers will pay any price for?"

"By catching a poor pregnant sturgeon in a net," Simon scoffed. "That isn't what we call fishing. I mean with a rod and line."

"We have people who catch fish with a rod and a hook too. I have done it myself, often."

"And what did you use for bait?"

"A piece of bread, or meat, or a worm."

"That's what I thought. You wouldn't even know what to do with a rig like mine."

Netchideff glared at him in an uncertain way. Then he stomped over and snatched the Saint's rod out of the corner where Pavan had stood it. He shook it as if it were an inadequate club, then pored over it from end to end like an inquisitve ape.

He unfastened the fly from where it was hooked into a little keeper ring near the butt, and held it up in his huge paw to squint at it.

"This is what you catch fish with?" he demanded.

"That's right," said the Saint. "It's an artificial fly."

"It is only some little feathers on a hook."

"That's all. But you see, the kind of fisherman I'm talking about would be ashamed to catch a fish with anything that a fish could actually eat. You don't have to be very clever to make a fish

take a bite at a good meal. The only time you prove that you're really smarter than a fish is when you can fool it into taking a bite at a piece of tin, a few feathers, or an old shoe-lace—anything that no fish would dream of eating if it wasn't for the way you offered it."

Netchideff shook his head puzzledly.

"But why do you want to do that when it is much easier with a worm?"

"A Communist couldn't begin to understand," answered the Saint. "But the idea is to give even a poor fish a sporting chance."

The pilot's glower darkened.

"I do not believe you. It is some kind of bourgeois propaganda."

"Comrade, you've just cleaned three fish that swallowed it."

"How do you make fish eat these feathers?"

"You cast the fly out on the water, and if you do it right a fish comes and takes it. But as I said, no Russian could ever do it."

"A Russian can do anything that you can," Netchideff said violently.

"One ruble will get you fifty dollars that *you* can't."

Netchideff hefted the rod, as if he had half a mind to hit Simon across the face with it. Then he looked at it again, and at the little red-bodied fly dancing at the end of the leader. A confused sort of anger twisted his face in a way that was incongruously suggestive of a baby preparing to cry.

"I will show you," he said. "I will catch more fish than you with this thing. If I do not, it will prove you are lying!"

He flung open the door and went out.

Marian Kent and the Saint looked at each other without daring to speak.

The door opened again and Netchideff stood there.

"I do not want you to think that you have changed anything for yourselves," he said. "I have to pass the time, that is all. It does not suit me to kill you, Templar, until Julius returns and I am ready to leave. So it is good that you have time to think of your mistakes. As for this pretty and foolish girl"—his yellowish cat's eyes shifted to her with the naked directness of an animal—"I am not in a hurry for her because I do not need to be. I am going to take her back to my submarine where I can enjoy her better, and when I have enough my comrades will be glad to have their turn, until we get home and give her to other comrades who will ask her questions about the Canadian Police."

VI

"If I live to be a hundred," Marian said at last, and giggled a little hysterically, "I don't sup-

pose I'll ever listen to a more fantastic argument."

"It worked, though, didn't it?" Simon grinned tightly.

"I still can't believe it. I can't think why."

"I gambled on a psychological gimmick. Haven't you noticed the formula in all the Communist purges, how they can't be satisfied with just erasing the opposition, as every other dictatorship has been? Their heretics have got to confess, and acknowledge how wrong they've been and how richly they deserve their punishment. I don't know how a psychiatrist would explain it, I just know how it works. So I figured Igor mightn't be able to resist the chance to make me eat crow before he kills me."

"How long will he try?"

"An hour—maybe more if he's stubborn."

"But as he kindly told us, it won't make any difference to what we've got coming," she said. "When Pavan gets back with that part, the liquidation will proceed as scheduled."

"We're still ahead. Any time we can keep him arguing, fishing, or playing charades, is time where he won't be developing his nastier ideas. And time for the cavalry to come galloping over the hill."

"We didn't kid him when he was listening," she said quietly. "Why kid ourselves? There ain't goin' to be no cavalry."

Templer met her eyes steadily. "Are you sure of that?"

"Have you arranged for them?"

"No," he said. "I'm on my own. But I hoped you might have."

"Pavan didn't spring this invitation on me till the last moment, and from then on he didn't let me any farther away from him than a rest room—where there was no phone. I was afraid to try too hard to get word out, because part of the time I was wondering if the invitation itself was a trap, to see if I'd try to communicate with anyone and how I did it. And at the same time, if I was really getting a break, I didn't want to risk fumbling it."

"You must have some regular schedule of contacts. When will the other Mounties miss you?"

"Not before Monday. I only work for Pavan Monday through Friday, and I'd already reported everything okay yesterday afternoon just before Pavan asked me to come up here. My boss will think I'm just spending a nice restful week-end — which I should have been."

Simon smiled fractionally.

"This could be quite a problem for us, if we can't find a way to get loose."

"Doesn't the Saint always have something up his sleeve?"

"Sometimes I have had a knife. But not today. In any case, it wouldn't have done any good.

That's one of the various advantages of handcuffs. You can't cut them off without special tools." He stared at his wrists. "Of course, you could cut your hands off. They say some animals caught in a trap will do that."

She shuddered almost imperceptibly.

"I don't know whether I could do it."

"Frankly, neither do I. But fortunately we don't have the gruesome decision to make. No knife."

"How did Houdini do it?"

"If the handcuffs weren't fixed in advance, he had a key stashed away somewhere. But I wasn't told there were going to be handcuffs. No key."

"And you can't take them apart, can you? No screwdriver. No hacksaw. No file."

"I'll never be able to look a boy scout in the eye again," he said, "but I'm not wearing one of those things."

"Could you pick the lock?"

"Maybe, if you were wearing a bobby pin, or even a hairpin." He glanced over her short-cut dark hair. "But you aren't, of course."

"I haven't even a safety pin—or any kind of pin."

He looked down at his waist.

"And out of all the ordinary belts I've got," he said, "I had to pick one with a new-fangled plastic catch instead of a buckle. If I ever get out of here, it goes without fanfare in the ashcan."

"A bed spring!" she gasped.

It was a forlorn idea, but they went through some strained contortions to explore its far-fetched possibility. This did not take long.

"The hell with Progress," said the Saint. "And especially foam rubber."

They sat on their shared corner of the bunk again, linked together around the corner post.

"There's nothing we could reach, is there?" she said. "I mean with our feet, as far as they could stretch."

"No," he said briefly. "If I could get at my tackle box, it might be a different story. But Julius and Igor aren't dopes, and they knew I couldn't make my legs twelve feet long."

He studied the post that their arms were linked around. It was a smooth pole fully five inches in diameter, with the bunk frames fastened solidly to it at their outside corner. Two other corners of the frames were fastened to the log walls, and their fourth corners were in the corner of the cabin itself. The pole went down to some attachment through a snug-fitting hole in the floor planking, and its upper end was notched into a tie beam overhead. It looked and felt as solid as a growing tree, but it was the only possible weak point left to try.

"Let's see if we can shake this loose," Simon said grimly.

For several minutes he heaved, pulled, jolted, pushed, and twisted against the pole from a number of carefully selected angles. Because of the way their arms were intertwined, he knew that some of his savage onslaughts must have hurt her cruelly, but she never uttered a sound of protest and added all that she could of her strength to his efforts.

Presently they were both bruised and spent; and the pole had not budged or given any sign of budging.

"We could start a fire and hope the pole would burn faster than it burned us," Simon said between deep breaths. "But he took my matches and left them over there on the table, and even a boy scout would need another stick to rub against this one."

"We could start gnawing it like beavers," she said, "but I think it would last longer than our teeth."

Then she suddenly sobbed once, and hid her face in his shoulder.

Simon cursed at not having even a cigarette to bolster an illusion of nonchalance.

So this was what it was like, he thought, when your luck finally ran out. He had been within a hair's breadth of this identical situation a dozen times before; but always there had been some forgotten trump in his hand, some unappreciated weapon up his sleeve, some ultimate implausible contingency that might yet bring rescuing cavalry over the hill. Now every scant possibility had been checked off in remorseless rotation, every prospective mirage had been methodically eliminated.

As a matter of concrete and incontrovertible fact, unless some fairy-tale trout popped its head out of the water and with a few exceptionally well-chosen words converted Igor Netchideff to Buddhism, they had—as the cliché succinctly says—had it.

It was a curiously hollow and undramatic realization, in the same way that the somber machinery of an execution is an anticlimax to the pageantry and excitement of a murder trial.

"I guess it had to come to this some time," said the Saint. "But I never really believed it."

Presently Marian said: "I wonder why women always have to get raped. And why it seems to matter so much."

"They should specially avoid tangling with Russians," he said.

"Do you think you could manage to strangle me?" she asked in a small expressionless voice.

He looked at her, and her eyes were unforgettably serious.

"Shut up," he said roughly. "Igor may still drop dead first."

There was a crunch of heavy feet outside, and Igor Netchideff stomped back in, very much alive.

He flung the Saint's rod down with a resounding crash.

"You try to make me a fool," he thundered. "First, that absurd fly cannot be cast. It is too light, it has no weight, you cannot throw it anywhere. But second, even when I put it out a little way with the rod, in the water, no fish came for it. No fish would be so stupid, even the fish of a capitalist country. Therefore you only pretend you can do things which you cannot, to deceive and frighten other people with nothing, as your leaders would try to do to the Soviets."

He kicked the rod, and cursed.

"You're too easily discouraged," said the Saint. "I probably wouldn't do any better the first time I tried fishing in the Volga, until I learned how to handle a Party line."

VII

The pilot's face was congested with the frustration of a man who senses that he is being mocked and yet cannot confidently isolate and specify the taunt. After a long moment during which it seemed to be a toss-up whether he would try to rip the Saint to pieces or settle for rupturing one of his own blood-vessels, he turned abruptly and marched himself heavily to the stove.

He chunked fat from a can into the skillet and began to fry the trout which he had cleaned earlier.

The simple activity of watching and turning them, perhaps combined with the savory aromas that began to permeate the air, seemed to alleviate his temper. After a while he began crooning musically to himself as he had done while he was cleaning the fish. But for the baritone register of his voice, it would have been exactly reminiscent of an easily distracted infant burbling obliviously over a newly invented pastime.

Simon and Marian began to experience a sharpening ache of hunger added to their weariness and cramping limbs and other discomforts. But not for anything would they have spoken of it—or, for that matter, said anything at all that might have regained Netchideff's attention. Any intriguing new line of conversation or argument that might have occurred to them was to be treasured for the moment when Netchideff might need another distraction: for the present he was completely occupied, and that was all that mattered. It was like keeping motionless in the same room with an escaped tiger, hoping in that immobility not to be noticed. But as Simon had said, every minute of precarious survival was still a minute stolen from eternity.

But Netchideff hadn't forgotten them. He was only letting

them wait while he attended to something else. When the trout were done to his satisfaction, he brought the pan to the table and sat down and started to eat the fish from it, holding the head in one hand and the tail in the other and taking bites from the fish until it broke apart and he had one piece in each hand to finish in alternate mouthfuls. But in between bites he looked at Simon and Marian with the thoughtfulness of a tiger that is content to deal with one bone at a time.

When he had finished, he licked his fingers, belched resonantly, and continued to sit there looking at them inscrutably, like a conquering Mongol khan considering what to do with his captives. And as he sat, the lids drooped over his eyes, his head nodded, and his breathing became more audible.

He fell asleep.

Simon and Marian sat in still more incredulous stillness as the sound of breathing thickened into an unmistakable snore.

They let it go on for several minutes before they ventured even to whisper.

"We're still getting reprieves," Simon said.

"Yes, but for what?"

"Time to think of something, maybe."

"We're not outsmarting him. He's just playing cat and mouse. I know it now. This is his way of trying to break us down."

"So long as we don't break down, we can use the time."

"I know. I'll be quiet. I know you're trying to think."

But for the first time he heard weariness in her voice, the kind of weariness which is the foreshadow of despair.

And he was trying to think, too. He had never stopped. But no thought led to a way out. And only instinctive obstinacy refused to admit that that might very simply be because there was none.

But he went on trying.

They talked very little more. It was easier not to. But whenever one of them moved to revive a numbed muscle, the other could feel it, and it was like an intimate reassurance in the strange closeness which had been forced on them.

Time, which seemed so precious for the miracles it might have to find room for, nevertheless seemed to crawl in slow motion through the revelation of the miracles it was not going to produce . . .

Until, creeping imperceptibly into dominance against the reverberating counterpoint of the pilot's snores, the puttering approach of an identifiable motorboat forced itself into the Saint's ears, and he looked down at his wrist watch and was stunned to discover how treacherously two hours had melted away.

A moment later the rhythm of Netchideff's snoring ended in a

single grunt. His eyes opened, without any other movement of his body, and he also listened.

He looked out of the window, for a minute or two, while the chugging drew closer. Then he stood up without haste, yawned and stretched mightily, and went to the door. With a brief glance at his prisoners to satisfy himself that they were still helpless, he went out, and they heard his footsteps clumping down towards the lake.

"Well," she said. "Have you thought of anything?"

He shook his head.

"No." It was too late for any more pretending. "I'm sorry, Marian."

"I'm sorry too," she said with a little sigh. "I always knew I'd meet you some day, but I imagined it very differently from this."

"You did?" Any conversation would have seemed trivial now, but any triviality was good if it kept worse things out of her mind for a few moments longer. "How?"

"Didn't my name mean anything to you?"

"I'm afraid not. Should it?"

"Do you remember anyone else named Kent?"

"Oh. Yes." Two little lines notched in between his brows. "One of my very best friends, a long long time ago, was named Kent."

"Norman Kent."

His eyes were frozen on her face.

"How did you know?"

"He was an uncle of mine. I hardly remember him at all as a person, of course—I was still in kindergarten when he died. But I heard about it later, what little anybody ever knew. He was killed doing something with you, wasn't he?"

"He gave his life," said the Saint. "For me, and a few others—or perhaps millions. He did one of the bravest things a man ever did for his friends, and maybe for the world too. But I never knew—"

"Why should you? He wouldn't be likely to talk about a brat like me."

He was still staring at her half unbelievingly. And through his memory flooded the faces and the voices and the movements of the band of reckless young men that he had led back in those crusading days that were sometimes almost forgotten, the days that Major Vernon Ascony had uncomfortably reminded him of in Singapore to spark the train that had led halfway around the world to this moment. And most vividly of all he recalled a cottage in England, by the Thames, with the shadows of a peaceful summer evening lengthening over the garden, and the dark serious face of Norman Kent as he signed his own death-warrant

and managed to hide from all of them what he had done.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he asked.

"Would it have made any difference? There were other things that seemed a bit more urgent. Anyway, I was hoping for a better occasion, when I could ask you to tell me the whole story."

"And now there's no time," he said bitterly. "But I will tell you, you should be prouder than a princess to have Norman Kent for an uncle."

"If I were the least bit superstitious," she said, "I'd have to believe there was some thread of Fate binding the Kent wagon to your star."

His face had hardened into planes and grooves of bronze.

"It's a coincidence," he said flatly. "But I wish to hell you'd kept it to yourself."

Hurt flicked her face like an invisible whip.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to make it worse."

"I didn't mean that," he said. "But in any good corny story, this would be where I repaid a debt and gave you the life that Norman gave me. But I don't even see a chance of that. I think that's what's hardest to take."

Her arm moved and pressed against his.

"If either of us gets the chance to do the ungodly any damage, right up to the last moment, we'll do it," she said. "And, please, I'd like to be kissed just once more by a man who wouldn't have to force me."

He turned to her and their lips met, firmly and tenderly, yet without passion, in a kiss such as few men can have known.

But not for an instant had Netchideff slipped out of his awareness altogether.

Almost unconsciously, between their speeches and their silences, he had heard the motor-boat throttle down as it reached the dock. Then, after a short pause, he had heard it start up again, and recede again for a certain distance, and stop again: he realized quickly that Netchideff must have jumped in and told Pavan to take him out at once to the seaplane, to make the repair with the part that Pavan had brought. Then for a long time there had been silence, which was broken at last by the sudden shocking roar of the seaplane's engine. The seaplane's engine boomed up in a smooth vibrant prolonged crescendo of power, and died no less smoothly down until a switch cut it off. Then, after a much shorter interval, the stutter of the motor-boat replaced it, plodding stolidly back towards the dock.

The repair had been made and tested: it worked, and the pilot was ready to go.

Pavan entered the cabin first, with Netchideff close behind him. Pavan looked sullen, but the

pilot seemed to radiate elemental good spirits. He took the Saint's automatic from his hip pocket and released the safety.

"Go on, Julius," he said. "Separate the girl, and handcuff her again."

"Damn it, you're a stubborn son-of-a-gun, Igor," grumbled Pavan. "Why can't I make you see how much more complicated this is? You could have given me the stuff you brought while we were out at the plane. Instead of which, I'll have to go back again with you and—"

"Please," Netchideff said, grinning—and perhaps only a nervous man would have thought that the gun he held was not too careful about where it pointed. "Do what I ask."

Pavan took a small key from his pocket and approached the bunk warily. He held one of Marian's wrists firmly in one hand, staying on the opposite side of her from the Saint, while he unlocked her handcuffs with the other. The instant the hand he was not holding was free, she jerked it around the corner pole and clawed at him like a wildcat; but he was ready for her with strength and leverage. He was extremely skilfull, and in only a moment she was handcuffed again, this time behind her back. To escape the still undaunted menace of her wildly kicking feet he flung her bodily at Netchideff. The pilot caught her arm near the shoulder with his left hand alone, holding her at arm's length and chuckling as she sobbed impotently in his gorilla grasp.

"Now, please, the same for Templar," Netchideff said.

"What's the matter with you?" Pavan argued. "Why—"

"Please," Netchideff said.

Pavan approached Simon even more warily, although with the same technique. But instead of pulling away the instant it was released, as Pavan was reasonably anticipating, the Saint's free hand shot forward. It grasped Pavan by the slack front of his plaid shirt and then recoiled again with incredible violence, jerking Pavan forward to hit the pole crunchingly with his face.

In another blurring whirlwind of movement it was Pavan whose arms were pinioned behind him; and Simon was holding him up like a shield.

"How about it, Igor?" Simon asked grittily. "Shall we talk a trade?"

"I will show you," Netchideff said genially.

The gun barked in his hand, and Pavan screamed once and then was only a dead weight in more than a mere figure of speech.

Simon let him fall, and waited for the next shot.

"You only shortened his life by a few seconds," Netchideff said. "I had decided to kill him

in any case. Since he had already been noticed by the Canadian police, and was stupid enough to let both of you find this place, he could be no more use to us."

"A nice way to reward an old comrade," Simon remarked.

"He was not a comrade. It was only a business arrangement."

Without a change of expression or any other warning, Netchideff jerked the girl towards him and hit her on the head with the butt of the gun in his clubbed fist. As her knees buckled, he kept hold of her and hoisted her over his left shoulder with a twist of his powerful left arm, exactly as he might have slung a heavy sack. And through all those movements the automatic made adaptations so that it did not lose its aim on the Saint for more than a decimal part of a second.

It was all done in a fragment of the time it takes to recite, and Simon still looked down the barrel of the gun and wondered what blind hope would keep him obedient until the irrevocable bullet crashed into his brain.

"Pick up your rod," Netchideff ordered. "Before I kill you, you will prove that you have lied."

VIII

The Saint stood on the floating dock in the bright afternoon sun, the fly rod in his hand. Netchideff had dropped the girl from his shoulder into the bottom of the motor-boat, where she lay still mercifully unconscious, and had cast off the mooring lines. He had not started the motor, but the breeze was carrying the boat steadily away over a widening slick of water. The pilot stood up squarely in the boat with his legs spread like a foreshortened Colossus, the gun which he never forgot to control no matter what else he had to do still leveled at the Saint from his lumpy fist.

"Now, show me if you can cast that thing," Netchideff said.

"Why should I?" Simon snarled.

Yet in a sort of nightmare automatism he was making the motions of stripping line from the reel, gathering it in loose even coils in his left hand.

"Are you afraid to look foolish?" Netchideff jerked. "Or are you afraid I shall steal your secret?"

"You're damn right you can't make me this foolish," said the Saint. "You can go right ahead and shoot me, but you can't make me give you a lesson in fly casting."

"It is, perhaps, an American secret weapon?"

"Yes," Simon said, and the truth wakened in him like a light. "It is. In a way you'll never understand.

"Pah!" Netchideff spat. "You are too stupid to know how stu-

pid you are, like any democratic bourgeois. We are symbols, you and I. I with the gun which I have taken from you, which will kill you—you with nothing but your stupid toy, and your talk of what you call sport."

The boat was drifting away with surprising speed. The Saint had to raise his voice to be sure that he would be heard.

"And we'll still lick you," he said, "because you don't know what that means."

"You think I do not understand a sporting chance?"

How symptomatic, Simon thought, of the psychosis that is Communism to insist on pounding ideological dialectic even at that impossible moment. And yet his own compulsion forced him to fling defiance back. You went down with your colors flying, or some such traditional gesture.

"Who could interpret it for you?" he retorted. "Karl Marx, or Groucho?"

"I will give you a sporting chance," Netchideff shouted. "Cast your feathers, catch a fish —at once—and I will not shoot you!"

The boat by then was about thirty-five feet away—little more than the minimum range for any class of pistol marksman. But the fly on the Saint's line traveled half that distance as he raised and lowered his rod and set the fly floating lazily back and forth.

"And your Uncle Joe Stalin's mustache," said the Saint, with the most passionate sincerity he could put into it.

And his rod swept forward once more like a long graceful extension of his arm, and as the line reached forward ahead of it he released the reserve coils in his left hand and let them shoot out through the guides in pursuit of the sailing leader, and the whole line stretched out and straightened like a long living tongue until at the exact extremity of the cast the fly flicked Netchideff's face.

It did not hit the pilot squarely in the left eye, the improbably minuscule target that Simon Templar had extravagantly chosen to aim for. But less than an inch below it, in the soft skin under the lower lid, the little hook struck and pricked and then as Netchideff involuntarily flinched dug its barb deep and firm into the tender flesh.

Exquisite agony needled the pilot's face as the hook set, and lanced blindingly through his vision as the Saint put pressure on the rod. A reflex spasm contracted Netchideff's forefinger on the trigger of the automatic, but he had already lost sight of its mark in the sharp bright flash of pain, and even as the shot exploded another reflex was jerking both his hands up to clutch at the focal center of his anguish.

There was a remorseless pulling in the pain, a thin pitiless

traction that redoubled his torture at the least resistance and offered surcease only from yielding to the pull and leaning in its direction so as to reduce the agonizing tension. He leaned into the pull until his feet had to follow his tottering balance and he stumbled against something with his shins and the boat rocked and he was suddenly weightless and then the water struck him and closed over him. Somewhere in that flurry he let go the gun.

But even when he came up again, choking and spluttering, the pain was still under his eye, drawing him steadily towards itself. His clawing hands touched a thread too frail to grasp, yet their own pressure on it only increased the agonizing drag on the embedded hook. But the line would not break: the limberness of the rod was a spring that refused to allow a solid resistance against which the line could have been snapped. There was still no relief except in following that fragile but inexorable pull, half swimming and half floundering in the direction it dictated.

With a heart-stopping delicacy that no angler has probably been called upon to match before or since, the Saint played him like a fish, until he was close enough to the dock to be knocked cold with an oar.

When the Saint straightened his face seemed carved in stone.

IX

In Johnny Kan's restaurant in San Francisco, Simon Templar said: "You'll meet her. She should be here in a few minutes. But the Mounties still wanted her for a lot of dull routine work, digging out the roots of Pavan's distributing organization as far as possible, and that kind of mopping-up bores me. Is everything ready? The *gai yung yee chee—*"

"Yes, we have your shark's fin soup. And *gum buoy ngun jon,* and the chicken with *wing nien* sauce. What about the Russian pilot?"

"I think they're still trying to decide what sort of protocol to apply to him. When the politicians and diplomats get into the act, I'd rather be included out. So we made a date to celebrate here as soon as she could get away."

"That was nice of you."

"Besides, I had to find out how much you really knew when you let out a hint about fishing that was what finally put me on the track—when I got the point."

"You can hear a lot of things through the Chinese grapevine," Johnny Kan said. "For God's sake don't tell anyone, or I'll never be left alone. It was just a rumor that I hoped might do you some good. When I was a kid there were so many lousy stories written about opium dens

run by sinister Orientals that it gives me a special kick to think I did something personally to help smash a dope racket."

"Well, we dented it, anyhow," Simon said. "Although I don't suppose it'll be long before the ungodly are trying again."

"If they ever gave up, what would you do for excitement? Go fishing?"

The Saint grinned.

"I've been wondering if I could claim some sort of record. He must have been damn nearly the biggest thing ever landed with a fly rod. He was about seventy inches long and would have weighed easily two hundred and twenty pounds. I was using HCH line with a six-pound-test leader; and by the happiest coincidence I hooked him with a fly called a Red Ant."

The story of Norman Kent, referred to in this new exciting novelet, was told in a novel entitled "The Last Hero," later reprinted as "The Saint Closes The Case." and still obtainable in a pocket edition under that title from AVON BOOKS, *575 Madison Avenue, New York City. And very soon obtainable—though you may have to be at your newsdealer's at the crack of dawn—will be next month's* SAINT *with another Charteris saga,* THE WICKED COUSIN, *as rousingly dramatic a triumph for the Robin Hood of Modern Crime as we've brought you in many a celebrity-bright moon. It's straight out of the classic chronicles that made our Simon famous and it juxtaposes a crime most wicked with the strangest love letters ever penned.*

chocolates for miss pinhorn

by . . . Michael Innes

Miss Pinhorn's death was as mysterious as the life she led. But even more darkly terrifying was the mind of her murderer.

"THE DEATH OF Miss Pinhorn," said Appleby, "was decidedly bizarre. But it was some time before we realized that it was sinister, too. Indeed, if it hadn't been for my aunt we might never have thought of it. She takes a great interest, you know, in criminal investigation."

"I remember Miss Pinhorn slightly." The vicar set down his tankard. "My daughter called on her once when collecting for European relief. Miss Pinhorn owned a cottage here, I think, and so it appeared reasonable to treat her as a resident. But she opened her purse—in the actual rather than the metaphorical sense—and gave the poor girl sixpence."

The doctor chuckled. "Then you may take it she was stretching a point, and that your daughter's eloquence had moved her in uncommon degree. She was quite astonishingly mean. I was abroad when she died, and I don't know anything about her end. But I should guess that the chronic malnutrition of the

---

Michael Innes is perhaps the most brilliant English exponent of the "quiet" approach in crime fiction. So smooth-flowing is his narrative style, so still, dark and rippleless the vast oceans of retribution and frightening surmise he sets in motion with a deft flick of his pen, that his wide popularity on both sides of the Atlantic is easy to understand. Here is an Innes story which no alert librarian could possibly resist labeling: BY ALL MEANS!

pathological miser had a hand in it. Am I right?"

Appleby shook his head. "Certainly she was terribly mean—and about her food among other things. She would have lived, if she could, on free samples of breakfast cereals. But she died, nevertheless, of something odder than starvation. In a sense she died of drink."

"Dear, dear!" The vicar's features composed themselves momentarily upon strictly professional lines. "It is a deplorable fact that elderly unmarried women—"

"And it was the drink that worried my aunt. She simply would not believe Miss Pinhorn capable of paying out good money for the pleasure of drinking two pints of beer as it is today. It worried me, too. There did seem to be something rather incredible about that beer. But I see I must tell you the story."

"Capital," said the doctor. "And we'll try a second pint ourselves."

"Amelia Pinhorn was a woman of considerable fortune and marked eccentricity," said Appleby. "But while she enjoyed the benefits of her fortune all the time, her eccentricity was intermittent. For most of the year she lived in London the normal life of a leisured person of her sort: two servants, a fixed circle of acquaintances, concert-g o i n g, church-going—that sort of thing. Then for a couple of months each summer she came down here—her parents had been Sheercliffe folk—and led a solitary and miserly existence in a small cottage not half a mile from where we are sitting now.

"She had no contacts with anybody—not even the milkman. I don't exaggerate. Everything was sent down from town before she arrived. She lived on tins. It was said that she believed the Sheercliffe shopkeepers to be peculiarly malignant, and eager to poison her. In all this there is, perhaps, nothing very out of the way. Here was an old woman who had formed the habit of concentrating a tendency towards mild insanity within a two months' spell at sea, when she lived alone and was a nuisance to nobody. It was a public-spirited and rather heroic disposition of things.

"I used to see her taking her daily walk along the cliff—a handsome grey-haired woman, not carelessly or strangely dressed, but talking to herself in some withdrawn state that was decidedly alarming. And then one day she was drowned."

"Drowned?" The doctor looked surprised. "It sounds a bit of an anti-climax. Unless you mean that somebody drowned her in those two pints of beer?"

Appleby shook his head. "The beer was an agent, not a medium. Miss Pinhorn simply tumbled into the sea and was drowned. Or

at least it is supposed that she was drowned. For we never, you see, recovered the body. The poor lady went over the cliff just short of the lighthouse. You must know about the current that sweeps in there and then goes out to sea again past the Furies. Two or three times in a century the thing happens.

"If a body goes through there at a certain depth it gets sucked right down and trapped in nobody knows what monstrous system of submarine caverns lying beneath those three placid-looking pinnacles. And poor Miss Pinhorn passed that way. Which meant that all the king's dolphins and all the king's divers couldn't between them have dredged her up for a coroner's jury to sit upon.

"And this was awkward when the rumors began to go round. It might have been particularly awkward for Jane Pinhorn. Old women over their tea-cups would have credited the poor girl with the most masterly crime of the age."

The vicar looked disturbed. "This is not *really* a crime story, I hope?"

"It certainly is," said Appleby, "but whether masterly or not, you must judge. The initial facts were perfectly simple, and fell within the observation of a number of people who were about here at the time. Miss Pinhorn emerged from her cottage, locked the door behind her, and set out on what appeared to be one of her normal solitary rambles. She came in the direction of this pub, and as she neared it she was seen to be hurrying—like a seasoned toper, somebody said, who is afraid of being beaten to it by closing time.

"But she wasn't known to drink, and she had certainly never been in this very comfortable private bar before. Well, in she came, talking to herself as usual and looking quite alarmingly wild. She called for two pints of beer in quick succession, floored them, planked down half a crown, and bolted out again. By this time she was singing and throwing her arms about.

"If the few people here had possessed any gumption they'd have followed the old girl and seen that she did herself no mischief. But she was known to be a bit dotty, and they hung back. Besides, she appeared to be making for home again. It was only when she had gone some way that she appeared to lose direction and wheel round towards the brow of the cliff. By that time she was in a thorough-going state of mania, and she went straight to her death.

"Perhaps, you may say, she had a repressed tendency to suicide—we found out afterwards that her father had made away with himself—and the need for that took charge when her inhibitions were

destroyed by the poison. For this is a story of poisoning—as you, Doctor, have no doubt realized.

"I've said that my aunt was the first person to suspect foul play. That needs qualifying, maybe. For the notion of poisoning seems to have arisen almost at once at what you might call a folk-level. Everybody was whispering it, and on no very ponderable evidence. You may remember how it was believed that poor Miss Pinhorn was *afraid* of being poisoned.

"That may or may not have been true. I should be inclined to call it an aetiological myth—one invented for the purpose of accounting for an observed fact: namely, that Miss Pinhorn would buy neither food nor drink locally. What my aunt certainly spotted was the significance of the beer. It indicated, she said, a sudden pathological thirst. Together with the very rapid onset of a violent mania or delirium, it should give us a very good guide to the sort of poison at work.

"When I say 'us' I mean, of course, the local police and myself. It's a queer thing that I seldom quit Scotland Yard to spend a week in Sheercliffe with my eminently respectable kinswoman without her involving me in something of a busman's holiday. But I felt bound to peer about. For a very little thought suggested to me that my aunt—in this instance at least—was talking sense. Had the body been recoverable I'd never have bothered my head. It was the fact that we had in that quarter an absolutely unknown *X*, so to speak, that got me really interested.

"Well, the first question clearly concerned the possibility of Miss Pinhorn's having poisoned herself, whether inadvertently or of set purpose. Her cottage was not a difficult place to search thoroughly—I shall come to that in a moment—and the hunt yielded what seemed at first a significant result. There was a tremendous store of patent medicines—something quite out of the way even with a maiden lady—all put up in very small packs. But each was more utterly harmless than the last. They were, in fact, almost without exception, free samples which had been stored away for a long time. I doubt if one can get very much in that way nowadays.

"A related inquiry to this was that into the dead woman's recent medical history. There was something of a hold-up over this, because in such matters she had been of a decidedly secretive habit. We did learn from her maids in town, however, that a few months previously she had been having trouble with her eyes, and that for some unknown reason she had to be hurried off to a nursing home. I ought to have seen a bit of light when I

heard that." Appleby paused. "I can see, Doctor, that it at once conveys something to you."

The doctor shook his head. "Perhaps so. But I can't say that I see much sense—"

"Exactly." Appleby applied himself briefly to the pewter mug before him. "And what you might call the irony of this queer yarn lies just there. But now I must tell you about the chocolates.

"You see, it really comes down to a sort of sealed-room mystery. Miss Pinhorn is poisoned—and yet *nothing* has gone into her cottage for days. Or so we thought until I happened, during the search, to take a second look at this half-pound box of chocolates. It was lying in the sitting-room, with the top layer gone. It wasn't anything about the chocolates themselves that struck me.

"It was the lid. You know that slightly padded sort of lid that confectioners go in for? It was that kind. And just visible on it was the impress of three or four parallel wavy lines. That box had been through the post, lightly wrapped, and here was a faint trace of the post-mark."

"Most astonishing!" The vicar was enthusiastic. "My dear Appleby, a fine feat of detection, indeed."

"I don't know that I'd call it that. But at least it sent me to the waste-paper basket. And there, sure enough, with a London postmark and Miss Pinhorn's address, was the scrap of wrapping I expected. And there was something more—a slip of notepaper with the words: *To Aunt Amelia on her birthday, with love from Jane.*

"So I hunted out the postman. Apart from a few letters he had delivered nothing at Miss Pinhorn's for weeks—until the very morning of the day on which she died. On that day he had delivered a small oblong parcel.

"It was enough to convince me I was hot on a trail. That evening, while the remaining chocolates were being analyzed with what was to prove an entirely negative result, I went up to town and sought out Jane Pinhorn. And I didn't care for what I found. Jane was as nice a girl as you could wish to meet, and she had liked her eccentric aunt. This birthday box of chocolates had been an annual occasion with her. She was a highly intelligent girl, too.

"Miss Pinhorn's symptoms, so far as we knew about them, were consistent with the ingestion of some poison of the atropine group. The sudden thirst, and the delirium resulting from incoordinate stimulation of the higher centres of the cerebrum, were consistent with this. Deadly nightshade, as you may know, is not in fact all that deadly. But one could no doubt cram a choco-

late with quite enough to cause a great deal of mischief, and Jane Pinhorn had possessed the opportunity to do this. Moreover she had a motive. Along with a male cousin—a ne'er-do-well in Canada—she was the dead woman's only relative and co-heir.

"I saw suspicion inevitably attaching itself to this girl. It was overwhelmingly unlikely, indeed, that any case against her could be proved. But that was a matter of the sheerest chance. Miss Pinhorn's body had gone for ever—a thing the girl could not possibly have reckoned on. As a crime of intelligence and calculation the thing would not do. The sealed-room aspect of Miss Pinhorn's way of living while at Sheercliffe, and the penetrating of the defenses thus created by this single gift which was so easily traceable to the sender: it just didn't make sense—unless indeed Jane Pinhorn had a repressed suicidal strain herself.

"I came back to Sheercliffe that night seriously troubled, and as soon as I arrived I went straight out to the dead woman's cottage. It was locked and sealed, but I had been given a key. The rest of that night—and I remember it as very long—I spent prowling from one room to another hunting for I didn't know what. Essentially I was casting about inside my own head for some logic in the thing that had escaped me.

"I don't think I had any notion of hitting upon a further material clue. And then, quite suddenly, I found that I had come to a halt in the little hall and was staring at an envelope lying beside the telephone directory on a small table. It was a plain manilla envelope, stamped ready for post, and creased down the middle.

"For a second I didn't see the significance of that crease. What had touched off some spring in my mind was the address—a single-spaced typescript affair of the most commonplace sort. *International Vitamin Warehouses Limited,* if mildly absurd, was nothing out of the way and wouldn't have troubled me. The snag lay in what followed. I know my East London fairly well. And the street in which this pretentious organization claimed an abode contains nothing but mean private houses and a few shabby little shops. And so the truth came to me . . . The truth, to begin with, about that crease. This envelope had come to Miss Pinhorn folded inside another.

"I slit the thing open there and then. '*Send no money. Simply fill up the back of this form . . .*' "

The vicar was looking largely puzzled.

But the doctor drew a long breath. "The nephew in Canada!" he said.

"Precisely. He knew about the sealed-room effect. He knew about Jane's annual birthday

gift. And he knew about his aunt's idiosyncrasy concerning belladonna. Some months before, its use by her occulist in a normal clinical dose had made her so seriously unwell as to take her into a nursing-home. He believed that he could get into the gum of a reply-paid envelope a quantity which in her special case would be fatal.

"Miss Pinhorn, you remember, could never resist a free sample of anything. So she would fill in the form, lick the envelope—and perish! There are Elizabethan plays, you know, rather like that. People die in them quite horribly after kissing a poisoned portrait. The envelope, if posted, would go to what was in fact a shady accommodation address in London, and our precious nephew would pick it up when he came over to England. He would also pick up the half of his aunt's fortune—or the whole of it if the unfortunate Jane was hanged on the strength of her chocolates.

"In point of fact, however many wicked nephews you may have in Canada, you need never have any qualms about licking an envelope doped with belladonna. Or rather, qualms are all that you *will* have. This amateur in poison had sadly confused a lethal with a toxic dose. With this particular drug, as it happens, the margin between the two is unusually wide. Having her special susceptibility to it, poor old Miss Pinhorn did go horribly delirious, just as she had on a previous occasion. But that she chose to hurry on to this pub near the cliff, and thus put herself in the way of tumbling into the sea when the attack was at its worst, was pure chance."

Appleby paused and stood up. "It wasn't, as it happened, the last stroke of chance in the Pinhorn case. You may wonder what happened to the nephew."

The vicar nodded vigorously. "Yes, indeed. He was certainly a murderer."

"He had aimed at being that, and he showed a certain efficiency. From a small town in Canada he had timed his stroke so nicely that the bogus circular reached his aunt just when he intended: on her birthday, and when Jane Pinhorn's customary chocolates would be arriving too.

"But he hadn't the stuff that an effective killer is made of. No sooner had he set his plot in motion, it seems, than he cracked up badly and went on a drinking-bout. Staggering home one morning in the small hours, and making his way through some public park, he fell into a very small pond and was drowned in six inches of water. At just about the same hour, that tremendous current must have been drawing Amelia Pinhorn's body to unknown depths beneath the Furies."

the blonde nurse

by . . . Thomas Walsh

The nurse of a kidnapped child is usually a direct suspect—if there is no clear evidence of her innocence. But McCoy was stubborn . . .

IT WAS THE first house she had seen in ten minutes—a small white building set fifty feet in from the road on their left, etched palely against the dim starlight in a glimmer of walls and dark, narrow windows. The man who called himself Collins saw it as soon as she did. In neutral, with his foot on the brake, he let the car roll to a stop by the driveway.

"I guess it's the place," he said. "A white house, ain't it?" He peered out. "They told me at the agency to pick up another nurse here—one this Mrs. Magnussen wanted. We ain't far from Lake Orchard now, lady. Would you get out and see if she's ready?"

In the back of the car, with the bit of paper she had been crumpling nervously between her fingers for the past fifteen minutes still clenched in her hand, Paula stared out at the house. She could see no lights.

"Yes," she said. "I'll go up. I'll see."

He half turned to her as she opened the door, his eyes nar-

To crash COLLIER'S *or the* POST *with a first story has been for many years the shining goal of a good many young writers. It does not necessarily confer immortality. But when a writer appears in the "slick paper" publications year after year, with the regularity of Thomas Walsh, he becomes a champ by all reasonable standards. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Walsh recently won a much-coveted Mystery Story Writers of America "Edgar."*

Copyright, 1941, by Thomas Walsh

rowed to a bright stare of sardonic and ugly mirth. The expression—she barely caught it—touched a vague warning in her mind. It was the first time during the ride that she had thought of anything but the boy. She got out, wondering about it, and moved a few uncertain steps toward the house. Then she saw the sign almost at her feet, set crooked on the weedy lawn: "For Sale, 40 acres. Six Rooms."

No, she started to say: *no, this can't be the place.* But before a word came out gears meshed at her back, and the car was twenty feet away, gathering speed, when she turned. She stared after it confusedly watching the tail-lights dwindle and vanish, hearing the motor sound fade to nothing around her. A joke she thought—a strange joke surely. But he would come back, of course. He—

He did not come back. For a time she waited foolishly for him, her hands in the pockets of her jacket, her dark, young eyes clouded by worry. It was a little over an hour then from the time he had touched her arm, knifing deftly through the crowd that was leaving the movie with her—a slim dark man she had never seen before, very dapper in a dark gray whipcord uniform and a visored chauffeur's cap.

Collins was his name. He was from the Standard Auto Rental Agency, he told her, and had a car waiting for her just around the corner. The Bannister boy—the kid she was taking care of—was seriously ill. It had happened after she'd put him to bed and gone out to the movies. An hour ago they had taken him in an ambulance to his aunt's place in Lake Orchard, and had then called the agency, and asked for a car and chauffeur to pick her up. Would she come along?

Paula had not questioned the man. She had thought then, as perhaps he had known she would, only of the child. A month ago she had nursed three-year-old Joel through pneumonia at the hospital. She had gone home with him, when he was well, because he was a delicate child, and for a month or two Dr. Holborn had wanted him carefully watched. Tonight Mr. Bannister—Bannister Steel, Bannister Mill Lathes—was out on the coast and with the boy in the big house on River Drive there had been only the Hansens, the old couple who had been servants in the household for thirty years. For a year then, since an auto crash last winter, there had been no Mrs. Bannister.

As soon as Collins spoke, Paula had all that in her mind. Instantly she saw it happen, clearer and more detailed than his words described it. A pain, a sudden fever, Dr. Holborn deciding on his aunt's place in the country—it all formed itself in

flashing pictures across her mind. She had thought then only the things a woman would think: that if she had stayed with little Joel tonight, if only she had not left him—

Now, in the quietness, the pale starlight, with the empty house at her back, the questions that she should have asked him filled her mind. Why his aunt's place, and not the hospital? Why had not Hansen come for her in the car, instead of an auto rental agency chauffeur? Why— The questions were all futile now. They came too late, as such questions usually always come. But as she thought of them, something vague, a chill and oppressing weight, filled her heart.

No cars passed on this unmarked road and after fifteen minutes she gave up waiting for one. She walked back along the road, knowing the man Collins had lied to her, and not understanding why. Past empty fields, past dark and barren stretches of tobacco land. He had chosen his spot so well it was after three before she came to a main road and was hailed by a compassionate truck driver who gave her a ride back to the city. It was almost five before she got out of a taxi before the big gray house on River Drive.

The boy had been gone hours by then—probably since eleven, when the Hansens, expecting her back, would have gone to bed. On the pillow, in the depression his head had left, the kidnappers had pinned the ransom note. The boy, it said, would not be hurt if fifty thousand dollars, in small, used bills would be forthcoming promptly and according to instructions . .

She called the police even before she woke the Hansens, before the words in the note that had warned her not to call them conveyed any meaning to her mind. They came almost instantly, two men in a squad car first, others in civilian clothes soon after. They questioned her all that day—questioned her till her mind was numb and their insistent badgering became meaningless. It was late, after dark, before she understood why—the thought came quiet at first—they did not believe her.

At nine that night they questioned her for the last time, in the little study behind the dining room. She never found out what the fat man's rank was. He might have been a plain-clothes man, or a detective sergeant, or even an inspector, but all she remembered afterward was his name—Monahan—and the way his eyes fastened on her, low-lidded, dull black, the moment she came in from the hall.

"I'm no delicate guy," he said, slowly, deliberately, in a deep voice that filled the room without effort. "I don't work up to things nice. That's what I wanted to tell

you before we started. Before—close that door, McCoy."

The other man—a younger man, with a lean, broad build and sandy hair—moved around the desk and closed the door. As he did so Monahan dropped a hand on her shoulder and rested it solidly there.

"Remember this," he said. "Me and McCoy ain't here to listen to the song and dance again. We've had enough of that today. You got that straight now in your head?"

He did not frighten her. In fact, his words had no effect on her at all, perhaps because it had been nearly forty hours since she'd slept.

"We're gonna look at your story very carefully," Monahan said, bending so close above her that his breath was hot on her cheek. "We're gonna look at it now and put it together just the way you told it. Check me all the way. A guy picks you up last night—a guy you never saw before. He picks you right out of a crowd and calls you by name. He gives you a trumped up story you don't question, and puts you in a car you can't describe. He—"

"A black car," she said, watching him with glazed eyes. "A black sedan."

"With four wheels maybe." Monahan went on, in a tighter voice. "He takes you out to a road you can't locate for us, dumps you off there and drives away. Two hours later a guy in a truck takes you back to the city. What kind of a truck? You don't know. What was it haulin'? You can't tell us that either. A guy, a car, a road, a truck—that's all we've got so far. And nothing really helpful, not even one little thing, can you tell us about any of them."

He tightened his grip on her shoulder. "There was a cop outside the Bijou last night when it let out. But he don't see you, or the guy in the chauffeur's uniform. Why?"

She said unsteadily, "There were a couple of hundred people around us."

The thick fingers dug deep, painfully now. "Listen to me," Monahan said, with grating softness. "Listen hard, you lyin' little tramp. Don't you think I know the way it was? You stayed out all night, sure—the way you'd stayed out lots of nights before. Bannister was away on business—everything was fine. A night out with the boyfriend. Who was goin' to know about it? Who was goin' to catch you?

"There was only the Hansens here last night, wasn't there? They never knew when you got in—you had your key. So the little punk that picked you up one night in some dance hall planned it all. You was nuts about him and you'd do whatever he'd say. He kept you out while his pals grabbed the kid.

Don't you know that now? Don't you see that's all he bothered with you for? Tell us where he took you. Tell us or—"

His eyes, small and savage, glittered over her. His fingers wrought dim agony in her shoulder. He was talking now of Joel —of the kid that loved her, that had cried for her last night when they got him out of bed. The kid they had somewhere now—hungry, sick, scared—and all because a tramp like her was trying to cover up. Because—

He was sucked back from her —his voice, his face, the pressure of his hand—by something deep and soft, enormous that blanketed her senses with swirling whiteness. She sank down through it wearily and slowly, into nothingness, into drowsy peace. Another voice—McCoy's? —beat faintly around her. Another arm straightened her shoulders.

"Drink this now," McCoy said.

Something cold touched her throat. She opened her eyes.

Monahan snarled at her as if she had never closed them: "We got all night before us, sister—"

The door behind them banged open. A new voice said, "Bannister's here—he just got in from the airport. He's waitin' for you now, Monahan."

They started out after the voice. But before they reached the door she arose determinedly out of the chair.

"I want to see Mr. Bannister," she said. "I want to tell him—"

"Tell him what?" Monahan asked harshly. "The way he lost his kid?"

He beckoned down the hall, and a uniformed man appeared and looked in at her stolidly. Then Monahan slammed the door and in a moment she heard the uniformed man settle himself outside it.

For a long while, in the chair by the desk, she sat motionless. Then she got up and opened the door. The uniformed man was not outside now; the hall was empty. The lamps were on in the living room, but no one waited there. Through the panel by the street door she saw that the police cars were gone from the curb.

Her temples began to throb.

Ten past eleven now—two hours since Monahan had left her. Had she slept? She opened the door and went out to the street, to cool air on her face, to the whisper of young leaves in the darkness.

Her mind was confused. Monahan's voice, Monahan's words rang faintly inside her. She walked away from them slowly, as if they were imprisoned inside the house, and there was no need for hurry to escape from them. Soon, in the soft spring darkness, they were gone.

"Hold it," a voice said. "Right

there, sister. Where did you think you were going?"

It was not Monahan. She was numbly grateful for that. From a car in the driveway beyond them, she saw another man get out as she answered.

"It's the nurse, Mac," the first voice said. "Goin' for a walk she tells me. Nice and quiet, by herself. Ain't that somethin'?" He chuckled.

McCoy's face, a vague shadow, looked down at her from under the brim of his pushed-back hat. "I guess she can," he said, in his quietly expressionless voice, "if I go along with her. You won't need me here, Andy."

"You're doin' it," Andy grunted, with faint reluctance.

She went on again, with McCoy at her side. He said after a few steps: "It's our job to be suspicious. Don't let it get you."

"Oh, no," she said. "I won't. You've been very kind. You allowed me to leave the house."

"Mr. Bannister asked us to leave until he pays off, and the boy is safely home. He doesn't want us around. I can't say I blame him. If I had a kid of my own it's what I'd do myself. But —well, there's a couple of us spread around here, just in case."

"Just in case my boy friend comes back, or I try to slip off to meet him."

He glanced sideways at her. "I thought there wasn't any boy friend."

"There isn't." She smiled at him, feeling oddly light and careless now. "That's just the lie I'm stuck with. Who'd believe it?"

"Me, maybe," McCoy said.

They reached the end of the street, where a tiny oval park faced the river. She smiled at him again with white lips and shadowed eyes. There were stone benches spaced along the bank. When she sat on one, McCoy put a leg on it and leaned an elbow on his knee.

"Listen," McCoy said. "It's nice and quiet here; no one's around but me. Why don't you let yourself go a little. Cry. I would. I'd get it all out of me. I'd—"

The river blurred before her, but only for a moment.

"No," she said. "Because it's all I've got left now against Mr. Monahan. You see—he didn't succeed in making me do that."

McCoy flipped a pebble off his thumb into the water. "I never thought of that," he said. "But you got to have something, don't you? Monahan sees things a certain way. The only kind of people he knows anything about is the kind he had to bulldoze all his life. He's been a cop a long time, so I'm afraid nothing is going to change him now. He doesn't understand—"

"I had an idea about policemen once," she said wearily. "That they were very clever, very

brave. That they helped people in trouble."

"Well—" He moved his shoulders slightly. "Some of them do, maybe. There are different kinds. Tough ones like Monahan; smart ones like the inspector; plain ones like me."

For a while she did not answer. A tug hooted twice, far off down the river. The North End bridge hung low across the water like a string of yellow beads. Presently she asked, very low, "Will they hurt the child, McCoy? Will they—"

"Not if they get the money. He's only three. A kid that age would never remember their faces. With somebody older they might be—more careful. But the way it is they're safe with a kid like him."

"Do you think—Mr. Bannister will believe what they say? Will he believe I neglected Joel night after night, whenever he was away?"

"No," McCoy said. But he sounded uncomfortable. "Why should he?"

"The others will, when they read the papers tomorrow, McCoy. The blonde nurse! That's what I'll be called in the headlines. And they'll look at my picture and smile at each other, thinking of the boy friend. Thinking—"

"Not everybody," McCoy said. "Not me. Don't I count?"

Her voice shook slightly, despite the way she tried to control it: "Yes, I think you do, McCoy. Now, more than anyone. I tried to help the others—I even tried to help Monahan. Because I've got to help, McCoy. It's the only thing that will save me now. If I had stayed with Joel last night, if I hadn't gone out, nothing would have happened. That's the thing I can't forget."

"You'd have gone out some night. They would have waited."

"Yes." She closed her eyes and leaned her head back on her arm. "But—oh, I'm quiet inside now. You did that; I don't know how. I could talk to you here. I could— Would you let me do that, McCoy?"

"You're a queer kid," he said, looking down at her gravely. "Talk if you want. How about a cigarette? Sometimes they help."

She took a cigarette, and his matches, and her fingers worked on the cover, folding it over, crease on crease. Behind her lids she saw the man in the chauffeur's cap again, his dark narrow face half-turned to her in the car.

"He was about twenty-five," she said. "Not very tall. Slim, with black hair. He had a flat voice, but he might have been disguising it. There was nothing else about him I remember."

"It isn't much," McCoy told her, rubbing a thoughtful knuckle under his chin. "But we know a couple of things. We

know that they had the daily routine of the house down pat—everything of importance concerning you and the Hansens and Mr. Bannister. After eleven, when the Hansens expected you back, they knew the old couple wouldn't look in on the boy. If they could get you out of the way they'd have all night to pull off the job."

"But how could they be sure, McCoy? How did they find it out?"

"Easy enough. Say one of them got friendly with a maid in the block. They could pick up plenty of dope that way—everything they'd need to know. It would be safe enough too. Now the girl would be too scared to talk."

"Yes," she said. "Monahan thought so, too. Only I was the girl."

"Monahan. He snapped the last of his pebbles across the rail. "Forget him. That guy—" The look in his eyes finished the sentence. "What about the car? You remember anything at all about that?"

At first she didn't. Only that it had been black, with four doors. Nothing else. He fell silent then. When she looked up at him he was staring out across the water.

She said slowly, with the silence, the cool air, deepening about her: "That's all. The dashboard was lit dimly. There was something round just to the right of the steering wheel, but it wasn't a clock. There was a little bulge in the seat beside me—an arm rest, I think. It had been pushed back."

"An arm rest!" he exclaimed. "Not many cars have them. And that something round could only have been the speedometer. I know of only one make of car that has it just to the right of the steering wheel—the Stevens. The Stevens car has an arm rest too, in the four-door jobs."

"That's something, McCoy. If we can be sure it was a Stevens—"

"Yeah." He grinned wryly at her. "We narrow it down right off to ten or twelve thousand cars. But at any rate, it's a lead."

He took out his cigarettes again and reached for the matches she still held. The cover was completely ruined. She had crumpled it back in thin, exact folds.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I do that all the time, whenever—"

She stopped so suddenly that McCoy's gray eyes narrowed at her across the match flame.

"I did it last night, McCoy, in that car—with a bit of paper I found in the crack behind the seat cushion. I was doing it when he told me to get out. I'd forgotten it till now. I never thought—"

Stiff-fingered, she groped in the pocket of her jacket, the jacket she had worn the night

before. The right pocket was empty. But in the left was a compact, a wisp of handkerchief, and, last of all, a bit of still gray paper, pleated in tiny folds like the match cover.

McCoy flared a match over it. She saw black letters spring out: "Sam's Reliable Parking Place, North and Jefferson. Two hours 25¢. All day $1.00."

"Don't get excited," McCoy said. "It might not be his, understand? Some guy might have dropped it there. But if you felt like taking a little ride—"

He had his own car a half block away—a cheap coupe that rattled them across town in ten minutes. The parking lot was on the corner, with only a few cars occupying it now, and one dim light shining in the wooden shack beside the entrance. When McCoy drew up and honked, a huge black man ambled out through the doorway.

"There's a guy comes in here," McCoy said, "driving a Stevens—a big four-door job. He's about my age—skinny, dark-haired. Do you know where I can find him."

"For a moment big, solemn eyes blinked at him. "A Stevens, boss? There's a lot of folks drive that car. I wouldn't—"

Paula spoke then, the slim figure vivid in her mind. Last night even the uniform had looked dapper on him. In the daytime, in his own clothes—

"He's a small man," she said. "I think he'd dress very well. He wouldn't be higher than your shoulder."

The black man scratched his head. "Well, ma'am—maybe I know him. He come in here two, three times a week, if he's the one I think. I take care of him, but I don't know his name."

"The license plates, "McCoy broke in. "Did you notice them?"

"Not the numbers," the black man said. "We got no call to mark them down."

McCoy murmured something softly. No, Paula thought, it couldn't happen as simply as this. Not—"

"I see him," the black man said, pointing with one hand down the street, "in that diner sometimes, drinkin' coffee there late, when I'm goin' home. I dunno about tonight. I ain't been down there yet. It's ten minutes to my quittin' time."

Paula looked at her watch—ten to twelve.

McCoy grunted, "Thanks," and drove on half a block to the diner, a narrow, spotless affair bedded in glittering tile. There were only four cars parked outside—a roadster, two cabs, and a battered yellow coupe.

"No Stevens," McCoy said, parking behind them. "But I guess he'd ditch the car tonight. He'd want to play safe. It would be natural for him to come back

here, to a joint where they know him by face, but not by name. They'd never look at him twice here, which is exactly what he'd want. It would be a risk, all right, but a risk with sense to it. He'd take care, too, to show up about now, the same time as usual. He wouldn't change anything at all."

Paula and the detective got out. Then she stopped, and whimpered like a child, "I can't go in, McCoy. If I saw him—"

"If you did," McCoy said, very quietly, "we'd have the boy back in an hour."

She walked beside him, the muscles in her thighs jumping and quivering. She went in with him, down the long counter, past the booths. His hand on her arm held all her strength; *McCoy, McCoy, McCoy,* echoed over and over in her head.

There were five strangers at the counter, three others in the booths. When they were sure of that McCoy looked down at her white face.

"Go out to the car," he said gently. "I had no right to put you through this. I'll call the precinct now and they'll have men here, and at the parking station in short order. It's what I should have done before we started."

She obeyed numbly, looking back at him from the door. The phone booth was in the corner, behind the tables and through the glass upper half of it she could see his face tilted impatiently upward as he spoke. A long face, bony, solid, real. She thought, *He believed me! He made me feel like a human being again. McCoy—*

She went out to the street, toward his coupe, toward a man in a gray hat and a natty gray topcoat who was just coming around from behind it. He didn't have the chauffeur's cap on tonight, but she didn't need that; she seemed to know him before she saw his face. The instant he saw her he stopped quickly, one hand darting to his hip, his eyes racing to the diner window.

For a moment Paula stood frozen, her throat a rigid muscle through which no sound could force itself. Collins only needed that moment. In it he swung her around before him, his left arm across her waist, his right hand clamped over her mouth.

"Don't move," he breathed savagely, against her ear. "Don't try to squawk. Who told you I came here? Who's with you?"

There was no way then to warn McCoy. She thought of him, coming out in a moment, carelessly perhaps, no alertness in him. Her head shook once under the numbing pressure of the man's fingers. *No one,* she wanted to say; *no one is with me.*

He did not try to understand her. Clumsily, holding her body like a shield across his own, he

drew her back from the diner entrance. There was another car, his car, behind McCoy's now, a foot or two away from the curb, its motor still running. It was a dark roadster five or six years old—not the Stevens. McCoy had been right about that too. Snub-nosed and powerful-looking in the length of its hood, one of its headlamps glared with light, while the other stared out blankly, like a dead white eye.

When they had reached the door his arm eased away from her waist. "I got a gun," he told her, in that hurried deadly whisper. "I'll use it if you yell. Get in there—get in fast. Keep quiet, and you won't get hurt."

In a moment he had forced her in before him, jackknifing his own small bulk behind the steering wheel instantly after. One hand jammed the gear lever into reverse while the other wobbled an automatic at her across his thighs. They veered back fast to clear McCoy's coupe, then stopped, jerked and rocketed ahead. In a flash they were past the diner; the last thing she saw there was McCoy coming briskly down the three steps from the door.

A block further on, against a red light, they roared into the boulevard, the river beside them now, the black bulky mass of Edison Park spreading away on their left. Watching the rear-view mirror, he drove very fast —so fast that Paula had a sudden wild hope of McCoy. Had he caught a glimpse of them from the steps of the diner? Was he following them now in the coupe?

They rounded a turn, swaying over with the rush of their speed. Suddenly, before them, a narrow road shot off from the boulevard into the leafy darkness of the park. With a whine of brakes, the roadster slanted toward it, until, in the crazy wobble of their single headlight, Paula saw the wooden trestle that barred it twenty feet from its margin and the truck, and heaped-up mounds of earth that loomed ponderous and solid at its back. Collins saw the trestle too, just in time. They swung right again with a squeal of rubber, back to the wider road, straightened out and picked up speed once more.

She knew what the trestle meant. With the river on their right, they'd have to go all the way around the park now. The thought of McCoy would not down in her mind. Could he catch them on the straightaway in his little coupe? And even if he did—

Collins gave a satisfied grunt and took his eyes away from the mirror. "You've been smart," he said, the gun still pointed toward her. "Don't spoil it now. Don't try anything."

As he spoke his foot let up on

the gas pedal, easing off the harsh, incessant whine of the motor into a steady purr. She understood why he had slowed the pace. There was no one behind them now. The car that had worried him must have turned off or stopped. Sweethearts, she thought, parking on that dark road clear of traffic. McCoy back there still at the diner, looking for her, thinking—

She knew what he would be thinking—McCoy, the only one who had believed her. She did not open her eyes for a long time, not all the way around the great concrete road which coiled like a hoop about the park. Not until they were past the last park exit, and had reached a straggling row of suburban houses.

There were no street lights here, no lamps shining from the curtained windows. The only car she saw was far ahead, a twin red blur of tail-lights. Collins followed it for half a mile, not drawing up on it, and slowing just beyond a crossroad. He turned in then, onto an overgrown driveway beside a small frame house that showed no glimpse of light. The single headlight clicked off and they rolled on gently into a wall of black that would be the yard.

They stopped. He got out before her, still holding the gun. Silently they went up wooden steps, through a door he unlocked, into a kitchen. Then through another doorway to a room lit dimly by an oil lamp, with a table in it, and a chair, and a cot by the wall.

Joel was on the cot, a small figure turning restlessly under the heavy coat thrown across it. She had him in her arms, the coat still wrapped around him, before she saw the other man in the room—a man older than Collins, taller, with a flabby unshaven face and a felt hat pulled down to his brows. For a moment Collins spoke to him in hurried, low tones by the door. As he talked, the flabby man, thumbs hooked in his belt, stared at her across the shadowy room.

"She wasn't alone," he said. "She's lying to you." He pushed Collins aside and came around the table into the faint glow of the lamp. His eyes were gray and cold, a blurred color paler than the stubble of beard that covered his cheeks.

"There was somebody with you," he said. "A cop, wasn't he? Somebody that followed you here?"

"Yes," she said. Could she frighten them? "Yes, there was. He knows where you are."

"Does he?" the flabby man asked. "Does he, sister? Then figure out something in your head—figure out what's going to happen to you and the kid the minute he steps into this room."

Collins moved jerkily behind him. "Ben," he said. "Listen,

Ben. Nobody followed us. I watched out for that in the mirror—"

There was a sound outside, a faint thin wail. When it came Collins swung around, his right arm, outthrust and rigid, knocking over the chair by his side.

"If you make another sound I'll kill you," the flabby man said. He had not moved at all. His voice was venomous. "It's the kid next door yelling for his bottle. Did you call up Bannister? Did you find out when he'd have the money?"

"He's got it now, Ben. It's all set—he told me that."

"I got clothes upstairs," Ben said. "Get them together. Your stuff too. Don't miss anything. We'll pull out of here now before you get every stinking cop in the city on our heads."

"Yes," Collins said. "Yes, Ben." He slipped out quickly, while the flabby man went over to the shade and raised it an inch from the sill.

Paula could see through it too. There was a lighted window next door, and beyond it a corner of a kitchen. She could see a woman there in a dressing gown, yawning, heating a bottle at the stove.

Joel whimpered sleepily into her shoulder, as if the wailing had roused him.

The flabby man was watching her, his eyes half lidded. "After we get the money," he said, "you and the kid'll be home in an hour."

She knew he was lying and what McCoy had said came back to her. Joel was safe, because he was too young to remember them. But she—

Her thoughts went no further. Her own safety did not seem to matter now—only the security of the small body in her arms. There were quick steps on the stairs, and Collins looked in from the kitchen.

"I got it, Ben—everything."

"Okay," Ben said. "Get out to the car and start it up. We'll be with you as soon as we hear the motor."

The blurred gray eyes never moved from her face. She had a sudden quiet thought while they watched her: would McCoy ever know? Or would he think the things the others would, that she had known the men here all the time, that she had slipped off to be with them, that they had killed her to be safe? She knew now the flabby man would kill her. He would take no chances. In the way he watched her there was no more pretense.

Next door the baby had stopped crying. The mother held it as she held Joel, smiling at it, feeling it rosy and warm in her arms. So near—yet so far away!

The car's motor started up outside. At the sound the flabby man hitched up his belt, so that briefly, against the cloth tight

pressed across his thigh, she saw the bulge of his gun. She whispered in a very clear voice, "Don't hurt, Joel. When you kill me—"

The flabby man looked away from her; he was not all iron. "Come on," he said, turning out the lamp, fading away from before her in the thick upward rush of the shadows.

He allowed her to hold the child. He would not kill her in this room, where people might hear but somewhere else—a quiet road out in the hills. And McCoy—had she thought once that McCoy would never fail her?—McCoy would look down at her tomorrow, his eyes perhaps narrowed a bit, his mouth very straight. Monahan might nudge him. "Didn't I tell you how it was?" Monahan would ask. "Don't I know her kind? Didn't I try to show you—"

"Out here," Ben said. "Quiet, sister."

Paula went by him into the kitchen, where a thinner darkness hovered, a vague shape that would be Collins coming in from the steps. Something glittered in his hand. A gun? Was it Collins who would do it, here before they left? Something about the shape struck her as wrong, a startling, indefinable something. *Wait,* she tried to say. *I've got the boy here. Take him, first. Wait—*

He didn't wait! The ragged sound his breathing made came to her across the room. Then, for the first time in her life, she heard a gun—a flat report, not loud at all. She felt nothing. Joel was still in her arms. But it didn't hurt at first. You never—

There was a crash behind her. She looked back and saw the flabby man on his knees, beating a shattered arm against the door. His gun was on the floor at her feet, shining there. She kicked it away as he reached for it. In the darkness McCoy's face, distorted, took shape beside her.

His arm caught her shoulders. "Here," he said, in a voice not half so easy as he tried to make it. "Here now—you didn't think you'd gone and lost me?"

Paula swayed against him, big, bulky, solid, more comforting in the dimness than an army with lights. There was nothing much else that she remembered, for a while.

Later—much later—she said goodnight to him at Bannister's. He had told her then how it had been—how they'd only started to rip up the park road back there at the Y curve, and how he'd knocked over the trestle and ruined a hundred yards of city grass getting past the mess. It had been all right after that, though. He'd saved two miles through the park, and come out ahead of them.

"He had only one headlight,"

McCoy said. "Maybe you noticed that. I rolled along at five miles an hour till I saw it pop up in my mirror. Then I pushed on ahead of him. It was the only thing I could do. I was pretty sure he'd never suspect anybody ahead of him, but that if I tried to make a race of it he'd lose my car in two miles. I kept him in sight till he turned in here, and then I swung around and drove back. I was wrong on the house, though—that's what kept me so long.

"I didn't get it right till the little guy came out and started the motor. I slugged him in the yard—nice and quiet. Then I started in and met you and the other bird. He didn't spot me right off. He must have thought at first that I was his pal."

McCoy's lips tightened.

"So did I!" Paula said, her breath catching in her throat. "But when you spoke, McCoy—when I saw your face— Oh, I seemed to have known somehow, all the time, that you'd be with me in the end. It seemed then that you'd been with me all my life."

He didn't say the obvious thing he could have said. From the walk below her, grinning faintly, he just gave her a sober wink again. She watched him get into the little coupe; she wasn't worried. She knew, already, the way a girl always knew, that he'd be coming back.

Black, winking windowpanes on an ill-fated El train made the famous Susan Dare wonder how many murders she would be called upon to solve in a night of unexpected violence. In our next issue Mignon G. Eberhart comes up with a short suspense novel stunner. It's called EXPRESS TO DANGER, *and it's the kind of story that evokes such superlatives as "the best yet" and "wholly wonderful." You won't want to miss this exciting blend of astoundingly agile deduction and trenchant action by a very great mystery story writer.*

shadow of the guillotine

by . . . George Fielding Eliot

Even a condemned murderer may not be wholly evil. Customs Agent Flynn found the good in Gennaro Caputo astoundingly microscopic.

"YOU COULD have her if you wanted her, Caputo," said the voice of the tempter.

Gennaro Caputo looked across the dingy barroom at the girl Rosa, plump and succulent. She was laughing up into Dominic Buda's scarred face, and one strap of her crimson dress had slipped from her shoulder. Dominic's hand — Caputo's mouth went dry at the thought of having his own hand where Dominic's was.

He was sick to death—thirteen years sick—of the desiccated hags whose transient favors were all he could afford. It had been that long since—

Caputo shook off the cold fingers of memory. He even managed a bitter smirk. "I could have her—on the lousy pickings I make from my junkboat?" he jeered. "She'd spit in my face. You're a fool, Willie Bonanzi."

"Dominic Buda has her now —on the pickings he makes from *his* lousy junkboat," retorted Bonanzi, pursing his thick lips. "So who's the fool?"

This is one of the most unusual fact stories ever to come from a gifted fiction writer's imagination. Paradoxical as that statement may seem, it is a perfectly accurate description of a thrillingly different kind of crime story, which paints an unforgettable picture of bizarre treachery and suspenseful violence. For famed military authority George Fielding Eliot has taken an actual police case from the abundant material at his disposal, and enriched it with the glowing insight of a superb story teller.

Caputo stared at the fat man, his dull brain groping for a flaw in the argument Bonanzi had presented. But there was no flaw.

Dominic and his brother Tizio operated a junkboat very much like Caputo's. It was certainly no better, and it was equally certain that they did not know New York harbor any better, and that their pickings weren't worth a copper penny more than his—day in and day out. There were many junkboats, but only a few "dealers" who handled and profited from their pickings, so that word of anything unusual in the way of a big haul would have gotten about quickly enough. No! Caputo was ready to swear that Dominic and Tizio Buda between them weren't doing any better at the junkboat business—petty dockside thievery included—than he was by himself.

Yet there sat Dominic in a new green suit, with pomade on his hair and Rosa in the crook of his arm—and wasn't that another bottle of grappa the waiter was bringing to their table.

Where the hell does Dominic get the money?

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," said Bonanzi, and Caputo realized he'd spoken the thought aloud. "You can get the same kind of money the same place he does—more, because you're smarter than a pig like Dominic Buda."

Caputo nodded. That was for sure. But deep within him, the voice of instinct cried warning. Thirteen years—but they never forget, those flics. Not when you've already been tried *par contumace*. Not when they've remorselessly dropped the knife on the straw-stuffed effigy bearing your name, and pronounced you dead at law.

Thereafter the law of France has only one urgent business with your still living body—to chop the living head from it and make it dead in fact as well as law. For an instant the shadow of the guillotine lay dark across Caputo's heart. He shivered.

"I'm smart enough to stay out of rackets," he muttered. "I want no part of money like that."

Rosa's laughter rang out loudly across the room. It was just as though she were laughing at Gennaro Caputo, who was mortally afraid—after thirteen years of safety here in New York—to reach out his hand for Fortune's tempting gift. Rosa's crimson dress had slipped still lower on her shoulder—

"I want no part of it, Bonanzi," he repeated. "But if I did—"

Bonanzi lowered his voice and began to talk in quick, staccato sentences. After the first few words, he had Caputo's undivided attention . . .

In another room not half a mile away—a room far less noisy, but hardly less dingy than the

bar where Bonanzi talked and Caputo listened—two other men sat talking in low, earnest tones under late-burning lights. The ground-glass panel in the door bore black-lettered words: U. S. CUSTOMS AGENCY SERVICE—and down in one corner, in smaller letters: SUPERVISING CUSTOMS AGENT—PRIVATE.

"It's getting past us somehow, Flynn," said the graying man behind the desk. "The city's flooded with dope. We've got the searchers working overtime, but they haven't turned up a thing in weeks. It's not coming over the piers, either. Any ideas?"

Customs Agent Flynn, a stocky, quiet-voiced Irishman, said: "If they're not bringing it up to the piers, they're likely as not getting it off the boat in the lower harbor. It's been done before, with plenty of success. Maybe it's being done again, especially since the economy boys laid up our patrol boats. Do you think the Coast Guard might just be willing—"

The Supervising Customs Agent lifted a cautioning hand. "Don't bring the Coast Guard into it till you have something definite to go on," he warned.

Flynn was running through a sheaf of memoranda. "According to these police reports," he remarked, "this flood you spoke of has a kind of ebb and flow to it, like the tide. I'm wondering if there's any kind of pattern we could work out and use to our advantage, like comparing the times when the tide's flowing strong with the ship arrival listings. If the same ship shows up consistently, we've got a lead with some substance to it."

The SCA nodded, eyes intent.

"And," Flynn went on, "I'm wondering precisely how they get it ashore. In a launch, maybe? What kind of boats prowl the harbor with no one paying mind to them? I'll be going through the records to see what I can find, and I think I'll just pay a call at the Harbor Precinct. The cops of the Marine Division know pretty well who's afloat along the waterfront."

"Good luck to you, son," said the SCA. "We could both use a little luck," he added significantly . . .

The sun was sinking in glory behind the Palisades, and the shadows of coming evening were creeping with a stealth barely noticeable across the oily waters of the Hudson. Close to the Jersey pier front, a drab little boat chugged steadily upstream. But what roving eye would take note of her, while the magnificent four-funneled *Ile de France* was standing majestically up to her pier, her tugs puffing and hooting about her like fussy ladies'-maids putting a royal princess to bed?

Gennaro Caputo was well content with his humble obscurity. Mentally he thumbed his nose at the tricolor of France fluttering from the liner's peak. Twice before he had seen that flag floating over ships that had disgorged incredible riches into the lap of Gennaro Caputo. But this would be the biggest haul yet, for Willie Bonanzi had promised him five crisp century notes for its safe delivery.

Gennaro Caputo kept his eye on the liner's towering stern as it glided past him. There was a figure at the rail, and suddenly as Caputo watched something dark fell into the water with a faint splash.

Caputo's quick eye marked the spot, taking careful bearings on a Jersey pier-end, and a ferry-landing on the Manhattan shore.

He swerved toward the Jersey shore, and sought the concealment of an empty slip, sending the little craft gliding into its shadows as though he had business there. An half hour later he came out again, and stood across the river toward Manhattan in the swiftly deepening dusk. Now his eyes were scanning the water. A ferry-boat went churning past, and he cursed it vigorously.

It was harder to see floating objects with the ferry's wake crumpling the surface into wavelets. Ah, there it was. Nothing odd in a junkboat picking up flotsam, surely. Caputo stopped his engine, picked up the red-painted wooden float, and sat down in the boat where the motions of his arms wouldn't be too conspicuous.

He started hauling in the line, hand over hand. Soon something bumped against the boat's bottom. Another heave, and it came inboard over the gunwale. It was a big suitcase—oil-skin lined. Caputo's mood changed. They'd make a fortune out of this, Bonanzi and his pals, he told himself bitterly. And all Caputo would get would be five dirty centuries.

Suddenly, without warning, the fear was on him—the old fear that had tortured him for so many years, the fear that had been fading out lately till he'd almost forgotten it. Suddenly he saw again the horrid vision that had tormented him for many a sleepless night—the twin uprights of the guillotine outlined against a gray dawn-sky.

He saw again the little man in the silk hat, standing patiently waiting, and the gleam of the great slant-edged knife, high up under the cross-beam, patiently waiting too. Waiting in chill silence while they led Gennaro Caputo across the cobbled prison-yard toward that short flight of steps that led up to the scaffold. He could feel the slippery cobbles under the wooden soles of his prison-shoes—

Screaming with terror, Gennaro Caputo seized the suitcase and flung it into the river from which he had taken it. The line snaked over the gunwale as the thing sank and the float flipped into the water. But of this Caputo took no heed. His engine roared under his frantic hand. and he went down river with the hammering of the exhaust matched almost beat by beat by the hammering of his terrified heart.

Almost it had seemed, in that moment, as if some eye of doom, vast and inscrutable, had marked him for its own . . .

High in the window of a river-front apartment on the Palisades, Customs Agent Joseph Flynn swore a resounding oath, flung down his powerful field-glasses and reached for the telephone. The dial spun under his frantic finger.

"Coast Guard," said a bored voice. "Bo's 'n Erickson."

"Flynn speaking. He's ditched it! I think the float's still attached. It's a hunk of timber painted red. About two hundred yards from the end of Pier Seventy-four. Get that? Due west, or maybe a couple of degrees south of that. For God's sake get the lead out! It'll be dark in half-an-hour!"

"What do you think searchlights are for, Flynn?" inquired a no longer bored voice. "We're on our way." The phone went dead.

Flynn slapped his hat on his head and went clattering down five flights of stairs to his waiting car. He wanted to get to the SCA's office by the time the Coast Guard phoned in.

They'd find it, of course. They *had* to find it—or the three months of patient, plodding work that had finally brought Flynn to that river-front window as the *Ile de France* came upriver would have been of no avail.

It hadn't been easy. The ebb-and-flow pattern had convinced Flynn that French boats were the carriers—two others in addition to the *Ile de France*. It pointed to a big syndicate at work in France, with alert and efficient connections in New York. A process of elimination had then brought him to the junkboat men.

They could not operate without a license, so he immediately had a list to work on with names, addresses and fingerprints. A few had police records. Of these, only the Buda brothers and, lately, Gennaro Caputo had showed signs of sudden affluence. Patient "tailing" next led Flynn to Willie Bonanzi, who also acquired a tail. Bonanzi appeared to be a "runner"—a go-between and general handyman for a couple of Brooklyn racketeers named Morris Schatz, alias

Murray Friedman, and Pierre Sam. Schatz and Sam had records, too—of many arrests and almost no convictions.

These, Flynn became convinced, were the big shots, the "business men," who put up the money, and reaped the big profits, and whose arrest and conviction would break up the whole syndicate. As usual, they were also the men against whom there wasn't a scrap of evidence that would stand up before a jury.

But there would be before he was through, Flynn told himself grimly. Bit by bit he checked and cross-checked, borrowing bright young men from the port patrol force for plain-clothes duty and keeping a steady watch on all his suspects—a watch which had finally led him to that observation post on the Palisades.

He had meant to nab Caputo with the goods as he landed, for he knew by this time the obscure Brooklyn wharf which Caputo used. In addition he had a new role planned for Gennaro Caputo. But now—

All the way across the river on the West Shore ferry, and downtown to the office, Flynn practically held his breath. He'd talked pretty big to the SCA. He'd used the Coast Guard and the port patrol force with a lavish hand, and now if he failed to produce results— The phone on his desk was ringing as he opened the door.

"You can relax, Flynn," said Coastguardsman Erickson. "We got it."

Flynn flopped into his chair, mopping the sweat of relief from his brow . . .

Gennaro Caputo was haunted by a new fear—a present and alarmingly imminent one which crowded the old from his mind. What was he going to tell Bonanzi? He dared not say he had been unable to find the float. They might have been watching him. They might even have seen him throw the suitcase overboard.

It wasn't so much fat Willie Bonanzi who worried Caputo now. He had a distinct impression that behind Bonanzi there were men who didn't accept excuses, and had little sympathy with nervousness, especially when it entailed financial loss to themselves. Caputo slowed down his engine as he plowed across the Upper Bay toward Brooklyn.

Going back and searching for the float in the pitch darkness offered no hope at all. Maybe he could stay out of Bonanzi's way until morning and go back for it then. Maybe. But there would be the night to get through, and the minute he didn't show up at the appointed place they'd think he'd double-crossed them, and was trying to peddle the stuff to another mob.

As, in fact, he'd considered, doing, deciding only at the last moment to settle for a safe profit and keep his skin unpunctured. To add to his wretchedness, his date with Rosa for that night was out. He wouldn't have the five centuries, and he dared not go near the barroom. Only Dominic Buda would be happy. Dominic hadn't liked to have Caputo cutting in on Rosa. And tonight had been the night that—

Caputo cursed himself and his weakness, and that old, haunting fear that turned his blood to water and the new fear that set him trembling as he eased his boat alongside the wharf and climbed warily to the stringpiece.

Instantly shadows moved toward him. He caught the gleam of a weapon, and heard his name spoken. So they were laying for him already! He whirled to jump for the boat again, but strong hands grabbed his arms.

It was almost a relief when a voice said: "Come along, Caputo. You're under arrest."

At least he'd escaped the ghastly horror of a bullet crashing into his spine, or the dark water closing over his head a yard from the night-shrouded wharfside.

"You got nothin' on me," Caputo snarled. But he submitted to the handcuffs without further remonstrance, knowing that behind bars, he'd be safe, and that tomorrow often had a quite startling way of taking care of itself. He'd wait calmly, and see.

He said no more—nor did his captors. They loaded him into a car, and headed north. Not for a Brooklyn police station, but toward the nearest bridge across to Manhattan. Why had they arrested him? Caputo began worrying again, and not until he confronted a ground-glass door with its block letters: U. S. CUSTOMS AGENCY SERVICE, did he know who had him in custody.

Nobody said a word to him beyond the routine questioning that accompanied the customary processes of fingerprinting, photographing, and writing data on cards to be put into the big steel filecases against the wall.

They didn't really have anything on him, Caputo told himself with confidence. They'd searched his boat, and found nothing. They'd said nothing. They hadn't even seemed disappointed. So what? They'd have to turn him loose—and now they'd provided him with an iron-clad alibi to put up to Bonanzi. He, Gennaro Caputo, had outsmarted these wise guys. He'd had the right hunch, he'd say—he'd ditched the suitcase for later recovery.

If it hadn't been for him being so smart, the Feds would have it right now. Caputo was feeling better by the minute. He wasn't so dumb after all. There might

even still be time for that date with Rosa—

The first thing Caputo saw when they led him into the adjoining office was the suitcase. It stood on a table in the middle of the room, and directly across from it, a pair of cold gray Irish eyes regarded Caputo with clinical interest, as they might have regarded a specimen of unpleasant insect life.

"Ever see this suitcase before, Caputo?" demanded Customs Agent Flynn.

"No," denied Caputo, feeling suddenly sick.

"You," said Flynn without heat, "are a damned liar. Let's see those fingerprints you just took, Harry."

The still-damp cards were laid on the table, beside other cards on which the blown-up photographs of other fingerprints had been mounted.

"A man who works around a gasoline motor all day, Caputo," said Flynn, "gets grease on his hands. Greasy fingerprints don't wash off easily. So if you've never seen this suitcase before, how do you explain the fact that your greasy fingerprints are all over it?"

Caputo was silent.

"I suppose," said Flynn softly, "that it will be news to you when I tell you that that suitcase is packed with opium in five-tael tins? About fifty grand worth of opium in the retail market?"

Still Caputo said nothing. What was there to say?

"We've got you dead to rights, Caputo," Flynn went on, remorselessly. "Ten years in Atlanta is the best you can hope for."

Ten years! He'd be an old man when he came out—an old man with a prison record. For Gennaro Caputo, it seemed as bad as a death sentence. He did not realize that the despair in his heart was mirrored in his eyes.

"Unless—" said Flynn slowly.

Caputo twitched. Unless what? Was there an out?

"Unless," Flynn repeated, "you're willing to cooperate with the Government. I make you no promises, Caputo. I can say, though, that it's the men you're working for we're really after. If you help us to get evidence that will convict them, I have no doubt the District Attorney will recommend to the Court that you be let off lightly. A year, perhaps—or even a suspended sentence."

If I live that long, thought Caputo. But there was no choice to make. Ten years, and a wretched life after that, against the chance that his wits might pull him through. Caputo had great confidence in his wits. Hadn't he already gotten away with murder?

He shrugged, and nodded.

Half an hour later he walked out of the building, with his

mind feverishly at work building a new scheme to double-cross everybody.

In the office he'd just left, Customs Agent Flynn was checking through the day's work, and planning his next aggressive move. The time had come, he thought, to do some checking on the French end of the line. With Caputo under control, ordered to report by telephone every prospective development that came to his knowledge, it was important to find out what the French police might know about Schatz and Sam. Check and cross-check. In the end, the pattern would begin to make sense.

There were fingerprint and general information files in abundance on Schatz and Sam, for they had a record of many previous arrests. The prints, with a detailed account of the current investigation, were sealed and ready to be sent off to the Treasury agent at the Embassy in Paris.

Flynn had decided not to send Caputo's prints to France. He'd been born in San Francisco and his record showed no French connection, nothing to indicate he'd ever been in France. But then something made Flynn change his mind. As he turned over the fingerprint card he came upon the photographs his helpers had just taken of Caputo stripped to the waist. The man's chest and back were covered with the weirdest tattooing Flynn had ever seen, and that was saying a good deal, since Flynn had been dealing with waterfront criminals for a good many years.

"We'd better send these along to Paris too, Harry," he suddenly decided. "There's just an odd chance the tattoos might strike a chord in somebody's memory over there. They look kind of foreign to me, somehow . . ."

Caputo told himself he was playing it smart. Bonanzi hadn't seemed any too happy about Caputo's story of his "hunch"—but he had plainly liked the idea of double-crossing the Customs dicks. And that made Caputo happy. Feed him a little stuff here and there, get the unsuspecting fool on the wrong track! There was a big shipment coming in on the *Ile de France's* next trip—no junkboat business this time—and Caputo had his plan of action carefully laid out. Right over the pier, while the poor fools of Customs hounds went nosing after boats on the river—the real shipment could come comfortably ashore.

Another five yards for clever Gennaro Caputo. He laughed as he thought of that stupid Irishman, Flynn. He'd even talked Bonanzi out of a hundred bucks advance.

They'd all of them have to wise up before they started matching wits with Gennaro Caputo. Thirteen years of misery

was enough. Now he was getting into the big time again, beginning to live as a man should. He could see great things ahead for himself in this racket—a lot of improvements he could introduce.

The old fear was gone in this new awareness of the quality of his intellect. Hadn't he left all that behind the day he'd fled from Marseilles hidden in the paint-locker of an Italian freighter? Had they ever found a trace of him since? Hadn't he been smart enough to think of saying, when he came to apply for his junkboat license, that he'd been born in San Francisco in 1903—just before the great fire which had wiped out every birth record in that city?

He'd almost laughed in their faces when they took his fingerprints for the license. Fingerprints were their stock in trade here in America, but back in Marseilles the somewhat lengthy police record of Gennaro Caputo —under a wholly different name —showed only the careful measurements of M. Bertillon's famous system. The French police didn't use fingerprints in those days. So when they broadcast an alarm for the man who'd shot down his sweetheart in a Marseilles street—

Caputo wouldn't think about dead Marie. He wanted to think about live, warm, exciting Rosa —Rosa who smiled at him now—

What a dumb cluck that Flynn was . . .

Dumb cluck Flynn was sweating.

"Just a couple of days, Chief," he begged. "We're nearly ready to close in. The word from Paris is—there's a big shipment on the *Ile*. We'll let it go through—then follow it straight to Schatz and Sam. They've got records a mile long in France. But if we pick up Caputo now, they'll all duck for cover."

The SCA shook his head.

"No soap, Flynn," he said. "This is State Department Business. You're forgetting Caputo's wanted in France for murder, and is already condemned, tried in his absence, under their law. The guillotine is waiting for him. It was the tattoo marks that gave him away. So—bring him in. I don't propose to have the State Department and the French Ambassador c l i m b i n g my frame."

"But the *Ile's* due tomorrow, Chief!" pleaded Flynn desperately. "I've got two good men tailing Caputo. He can't get away. Schatz and Sam may go on running dope into this city for years if we don't nab them now when we've got them dead to rights."

The SCA looked unhappy. "They're sending the extradition warrant up from Washington," he growled. "To the New York

police. I don't see—" He turned abruptly and slapped his hand on his desk. "All right, Flynn, I'll stall 'em for twenty-four hours. But by God, don't let that rat slip through your fingers!"

"I won't, Chief," promised Flynn, breathing a deep sigh of relief.

He wasn't quite so happy next day.

There were no junkboats out—none that were suspected, anyway—and Dominic Buda and his brother were staying close to their regular beat in the East River.

Caputo hadn't gone near his boat, probably because of a fight in a barroom the night before between Dominic Buda and Caputo—some row over a wench. Well—there was nothing to do but try the time-honored methods at the pier, and search the ship afterward.

The passengers that flocked ashore from the *Ile de France* were not too happy over the rigorous Customs inspection to which their baggage had been subjected. Flynn was up in the air again, looking frantically for a lead. The *Ile* had gone down on the list as a "hot ship" and baggage division inspectors, port patrolmen, agents were all on the job.

But nothing of importance was turned up. Only a few casuals, trying to smuggle jewelry purchases, were caught by the unusually rigid search. Flynn, sweating it out in the Station Inspector's office on the pier, saw the last of the passengers and visitors trailing out the exit with a sinking heart. He had accomplished nothing—unless the searchers came up with something vital at the last moment.

They were good men, the searchers, but Flynn had little hope they'd find what he was looking for. Probably there'd been a slip on the other side, and the shipment hadn't come through after all.

The door of the office opened and a girl appeared on the threshold—a quietly dressed girl, rather pretty in a coarse sort of way, her pale lips working with fear. Behind her, a young man in the uniform of a port patrol officer was ushering her through the door.

"I think this dame has something on her, inspector," he said. "She was walking kind of stiff-like—and she tried to lam when I stopped her."

Flynn brightened. Maybe after all—

The matron on duty had no trouble whatever in finding why the young woman was walking with such a strangely stiff gait. Under her dress she wore a specially-made skirt with pockets—pockets which held tins of opium. The young woman was more than ready to talk. All she

wanted was to preserve her own skin as cheaply as she could.

"Where did you get it?" demanded Flynn.

From the buffet chef on the *Ile,* one Pierre Juliau, the girl told him promptly. She was taking it to a friend. What friend? She didn't know his name. Just a friend. He was to meet her in a bar, and give her fifty dollars.

Aboard the *Ile* went Flynn with a couple of his men. Juliau, a smooth-haired shifty-eyed man of middle age, was quickly cornered in his rathole of a cabin. The sight of Flynn's badge sent him into a tizzy of fear.

"Let me go," he begged. "Don't send me to prison. I'll tell you everything. I've got more—here in my locker—lots more." He had. The big shipment—in two suitcases, ready to be picked up. A neat scheme to switch them through the baggage room as unclaimed baggage. Ironically enough, it might have worked, too.

Then why would big operators take chances by sending a peanut lot ashore with a girl?

"It was my friend Pierre Sam," Juliau said. "That's his sideline. Schatz is his partner, and they split even. Juliau has been doing business with them for several trips. But Sam was greedy. Sam had to make a little something extra. So every trip Juliau has been bringing Sam a little something for himself, and slipping it to the girl. She was Sam's girl. Her name's Margaret Georgeton."

Fine, thought Flynn. But how would it look to a jury? Maybe not so good. Just Juliau's evidence — and a smart lawyer would say it had been forced out of him, as smart lawyers always tried to claim.

"Lock him up," Flynn ordered. "But don't take him off the ship for fifteen minutes."

Back he went to the station inspector's office, where the matron still guarded a tearful Margaret.

"Let this be a warning to you, young woman," snapped Flynn. "If we catch you at anything like this again, there's a cell waiting for you. Now get out of here."

He didn't mention that a port patrol officer in plainclothes was waiting outside the pier to pick up Margaret's trail. It's a chance, thought Flynn. But I've taken a good many chances already, and she may lead us right to Sam. Catch 'em together. That was point one. Then confront Sam and the girl with Schatz and Juliau, and let Schatz in on Sam's little side-line double-cross. Point two. Out of that, we should get enough bits and pieces to fill out the pattern and make an air-tight case, even without Caputo. Caputo we won't have available.

But we don't need him any longer. His part's finished. It

didn't occur to Flynn until later that Caputo's "part" had consisted more in making his pals overconfident than in any information he'd conveyed to Flynn. To this day Flynn will deny that he'd thought it all out and planned it as he did.

Which only goes to show that a good cop, like a good general, often finds himself making the right decision without quite being sure precisely how the preceding mental process took shape. But right now, Flynn was more like a general in the midst of a battle—a general who has launched his attack and has nothing left to do but to await the results.

Back to the office he went. Once more the phone was ringing as he went in the door. The voice on the other end wasn't bored this time. It was the plain-clothes man who'd been tailing Caputo and he was very unhappy.

"He ducked me in the subway," he wailed. "Borough Hall station. He got on a train, then lammed out the door just as it was closing. I pulled the cord, but he got clear away by the time I could fight my way through the mob—"

Flynn's stomach turned over. He'd allowed a condemned murderer to remain at liberty. And now he'd lost him. Stonily Flynn got to his feet to go in and tell the SCA the bad news. The phone rang again.

It was the port patrol officer assigned to tail Margaret Georgeton.

"She's just going into a garage on East 13th Street, Mr. Flynn." He gave the address.

Quick excitement drove the sickness from Flynn's stomach. It was the kind of excitement—backed by a feeling of completing a pattern—such as comes at times to all men who follow the trails of criminals.

He jerked open the door of another office. Customs Agents Guilfoyle and Collins looked up from their desks.

"Dan! George!" cried Flynn. "Come on—quick!"

They dashed down the corridor, yelling at a descending elevator operator. Flynn's car was right outside. Uptown with siren wailing, traffic cops clearing the way they speeded—now east, taking the turn on screaming wheels and then west more slowly, passing with siren silent around a corner, and doubling back into Thirteenth Street.

The port patrolman came out of a doorway.

"She's still in there, Mr. Flynn. Two guys just went in."

In the garage office, Margaret Georgeton was having a hard time with a bullet-headed man in a gray suit. He had her backed into a corner, white-faced with terror.

"I told 'em nothing, Pierre," she was wailing.

Gennaro Caputo, leaning against the wall with a sneer on his face, laughed as Pierre Sam rocked the girl's head with double slaps.

"Stand right still, everybody," said Customs Agent Flynn from the doorway.

The laugh froze on Caputo's lips.

He'd had a hunch he was being followed as he left his lodgings. He'd seen that fox-haired young man once or twice before—too often for comfort. So he'd ditched him in the subway. He had to ditch him. Caputo knew what would happen to him if he led a cop to Pierre Sam. And he had to see Sam. Right now. Today. Dominic Buda had gone crazy. He was going to turn up everybody. Just over Rosa—just because Caputo was taking Rosa away from him.

Sam had to know—quick. Caputo could have told Willie Bonanzi, but he couldn't find the fat man. Anyway he'd get more credit by bringing the news right to Sam in person. Always play it smart. That was Gennaro Caputo. Always a clear eye on Number One. He'd met Sam once, he knew where the man lived.

Sam didn't seem pleased to see him, but he got excited right away when Caputo spilled his tale.

"Buda, eh? Always thought—never mind. We'll—"

The telephone shrilled loudly.

"Wait." Sam snapped "Hello" into the instrument. A woman's voice, started squalling on the other end. After a moment, Sam said: "All right, all right. I'll be there in twenty minutes." He slammed up the phone.

"Save me from all broads," he snarled. "Come on, Caputo. Got a little business to attend to, then we'll see about your pal Dominic."

Thus it happened that they arrived together at that east side garage just five minutes ahead of Flynn.

It was a lively session in the downtown office, while it lasted. Pierre Sam had gone off his rocker. He and Margaret had screamed at each other all the way downtown in the car. Then when they got to the office, there was Juliau. When Sam saw the buffet steward, he clammed. Caputo, watching, saw that this was serious. But he was out of it: he didn't know this new fellow. They had nothing on him. He began to feel better. Margaret told her story. Juliau told his—about Sam's little sideline. Caputo sneered. Peanuts. And he'd thought Sam was a big shot. Flynn spoke to somebody in the next office. In came agents carrying the two suitcases that had been found in Juliau's locker. They laid them on the table, and opened them.

Caputo stared. It had nothing

to do with him. More questions. Still Sam clammed. Juliau was doing the talking now. He spoke a name—Morris Schatz.

"Harry," said Flynn in a conversational tone, speaking again to somebody beyond the half-open door of the next office, "you might just bring Schatz in here now."

Two agents brought in Schatz. A plump, pig-eyed man in a hundred-dollar suit, sweating and steaming with fury.

"You double-crossing rat!" he snarled at Sam. "Running a sideline on me! Why, you—"

There was more—much more. Caputo was hardly interested. The big shots were big shots no more. Presently they would just be numbers in a Federal prison. But not Gennaro Caputo. Gennaro Caputo was too smart for that. Gennaro Caputo would be free—free to go back to Rosa, free to start out to exploit the connections he'd made. He might even keep Rosa to himself for a while. Of course, if times got hard—

They were taking the big shots away now. And Juliau. And the girl. A smirk passed across Caputo's face. Flynn was looking at him, his eyes very grim. Caputo didn't like the way those eyes surveyed him.

"The District Attorney is entering a *nolle pros* in the case against you, Caputo," Flynn told him.

The queer feeling of unease which twisted at Caputo's intestines didn't go away at this good news.

"So," Flynn went on, "that's all for you, as far as I'm concerned. But—"

The door opened and two men came in. Caputo knew cops when he saw them even in plain clothes.

"This is Gennaro Caputo," said Flynn.

One of the men flipped out a badge in a little leather case.

"Detective Lieutenant Klinger," he announced, looking at Caputo with that same grim expression in his eyes. He produced a folded paper from his pocket. "I hold a warrant for your arrest, Gennaro Caputo. A warrant of extradition, applied for by the French Ambassador."

The room whirled round. Caputo was falling, falling into a great pit, a stone-walled pit, with the shadow of the guillotine lying dark across the stones—

"The yellow punk's fainted," said Klinger, looking down at Caputo lying on the floor.

"Yeah," said his partner. "Now we'll have to drag him downstairs."

frontier fracas

by . . . Stephen W. Pollak

He fancied himself too clever to be caught smuggling anything of real value into France. But Chabrol had the wit to smile.

THE INSTANT the Rome-Paris express came to a slow halt in the little station of Modane the French customs officials boarded the train. It had left the Italian capital the evening before and had reached the French-Italian border just after dawn.

Monsieur Pierre Bourdillon had failed to secure a berth and had to be content with a corner seat in a first-class compartment.

He didn't mind, for comfort in traveling was his least concern.

Now he was watching benevolently, while the customs official went through the two heavy leather suitcases of the old lady opposite. The old lady was explaining to the bored official that, owing to certain obscure family troubles, she was returning to her daughter in Rouen. While she talked her wheezy, impertinent Pekinese in his little woollen overcoat kept sniffing at the *douanier's* boots.

The third occupant of the compartment was an elderly gentleman with the rosette of the Le-

Here is a story of continental roguery so ingeniously a-sparkle with the wine-bright insolence of a chameleon-shifty knave that it might almost seem as if the renowned Aristide Chabrol himself would be dazzled and over-awed. But luckily Stephen Pollak brings you reassurance in his first appearance in our pages with a brand new Aristide Chabrol yarn.

gion of Honor in his buttonhole who, producing his passport for a second time, mumbled something about "privilege diplomatique." Whereupon the official respectfully touched his peaked cap and, with a discreet "Mais certainement, Monsieur!" applied his blue chalk to the briefcase and portmanteau of the distinguished traveler.

Finally he turned to Monsieur Bourdillon. "Anything to declare Monsieur?"

His eyes roved, thoughtfully over the tanned, well-cut features in front of him. Yes, he had seen this face before.

Bourdillon shrugged his shoulders smilingly. "Would you believe me if I said no? See for yourself."

Yes, there was something unusual about the fellow—definitely suspicious. He was altogether too cocksure of himself, as though he didn't care whether he was caught smuggling or not. Arthure Billot had been in the Service for nearly thirty years and had few illusions left about his fellow-men.

Billot didn't mind the small-timers. A few nylon stockings, a bottle of Pernod or Cinzano, an ounce or two of Chanel No. 5 —pouh! But some of them were out for bigger fish, and it was those clever ones l'Inspecteur Laguarde of the Sureté was after.

Billot had opened Bourdillion's only suitcase (a bit too old-fashioned for such a smart, rather flashy bloke). And his skillful fingers were burrowing down through the pile of shirts, socks, shorts and pajamas.

How clumsy, he thought, as his eye rapidly measured the height of the case. Primitive! False bottoms went out with the Charleston, and this one was a clumsy job to boot!

He straightened up. "Come along, Monsieur," he said, more in sorrow than in anger. "I think my colleague outside would like a look at your bag."

Bourdillon shrugged his shoulders again, and followed the customs official, who was carrying the deplorable suitcase.

The old lady, the Peke snuggling in her voluminous lap, looked after him with a horrified expression.

"Tenez," she turned indignantly to the diplomat, "he might easily have murdered us in our sleep!"

The distinguished man went on polishing his pince-nez. "Madame," he said calmly, "we didn't get enough sleep for that."

"I don't understand it, Laguarde," said Aristide Chabrol of the Drugs Prevention Section of the Sureté to his young colleague.

"This is the third time in ten months that Prioux has been caught smuggling—what? Lucky

Strikes!" He smote the desk with his fist.

"I know, it doesn't make sense, does it?" said Philippe Laguarde. "There is something fishy. Our slick Pierre doesn't go in for that kind of chicken feed."

Chabrol, the stub of an extinguished *Gauloise* dangling from the corner of his mouth, poked a nicotine-stained index finger at the report before him. "Our man Billot says that the cigarettes were hidden in what he calls the clumsiest false-bottom job of his career. He doesn't seem to take much pride in his capture, does he?"

"Why should he?" Laguarde rapped out irritably. "Anyone copping Pierre Prioux, alias Dubois, alias de Chartire, alias Bourdillon, expects to find at least a million francs worth of heroin and not a few measly packets of American cigarettes. Bah!" He snorted disgustedly.

Chabrol lovingly fingered the blackened butt in his mouth and said thoughtfully, "Have you had a report on his fellow-passengers?"

"Nothing doing there. One was Louis de Chavaize, the First Secretary of our Embassy in Rome, and the other a Madame Adele Serles, a respectable enough woman traveling to see her daughter in Rouen."

"You checked her story?"

"We did. The daughter is in Rouen all right and harmless enough, too. Keeps a pet shop."

They were silent for a minute. Laguarde strolled over to the window and looked out on the Ile St. Louis, where the afternoon sun speckled the old chestnut trees with weird patterns. Then he turned abruptly.

"We know two things, Chabrol. First, Prioux has specialized for years in drug-smuggling. He has been connected with every important drug-ring since Nineteen-twenty-nine.

"He lives expensively, the kind of life he cannot possibly finance by smuggling cigarettes. Last time it was nylons and the time before that perfume. But we know something else much more important. Each time he was caught. Now a man like Pierre Prioux—with over twenty years' experience of the most dangerous kind of contraband behind him doesn't go and get caught with cigarettes at Modane and with nylons at Ventimiglia."

"Go on, Laguarde," said his chief, lighting another *Gauloise*. "I think I know what you are driving at."

"Well, if Prioux gets caught three times in ten months with some trifling goods in his case—and according to Billot an amazingly bungled job too—it seems to me as though—"

"As though he wanted to get caught. Is that it, Laguarde?"

"Quite. Now why should

Prioux want to get caught if not to divert attention from someone or something else."

Chabrol looked thoughtfully at his colleague. "Will you let me have the dossiers of the two previous cases, the one at Ventimiglia and the one at Bellegarde, I mean."

Next morning the telephone rang on Laguarde's desk.

"Good morning, mon vieux. This is Chabrol. Look here, I arranged with the Judge d'Instruction who is handling the case to let off Prioux with a stiff fine once more. I believe the next time—if he gets a chance to make a next time—we shall find a little more than cigarettes or whatever our friend chooses to have found on him. Come up to my office and I will show you what I have in mind."

Two months later the Vienna-Paris Express pulled up in the small but neat station of Bellegarde at the Franco-Swiss frontier.

The French douaniers climbed aboard and began their examinations, but not before the Chief Passport Control Officer had informed them that a Monsieur Alexis De Chartier was in the third coach from the rear. De Chartier's name was on the confidential list circulated by Inspector Laguarde in Paris by all French Customs posts.

The third coach from the rear was not a sleeper. Monsieur de Chartier had spent the night sitting up in a comfortable enough first-class compartment which he shared with three fellow-passengers.

Two customs officials entered the compartment. The examination of the luggage of two staid Swiss businessmen was cursory and quick. When asked whether he had anything to declare M. de Chartier waved a nonchalant hand towards his expensive suitcase.

"I hardly think so, but see for yourself," he said.

While the younger of the two officials tackled the luggage of the fourth occupant of the compartment, an elegant though slightly extravagantly-dressed young lady, his colleague had seemingly finished his search of de Chartier's bag.

"Eh bien, are you satisfied?" De Chartier asked with an insolent smile.

"Quite satisfied, Monsieur." Suddenly the official whirled around, stooped and lifted a small, frightened dog, a King Charles, clad in a little camel-hair coat, with a dainty miniature handkerchief in the tiny breast-pocket.

Then he faced De Chartier who had jumped up from his seat with a cry. "Quite satisfied, Monsieur Prioux, that the ridiculous false bottom of your case contains either cigarettes or nylons or liquor, while the padded

coat of this young lady's dog contains a fortune in drugs. You'd better come along, and you, too, mademoiselle."

* * *

Chabrol replaced the receiver with a broad grin.

"Courtot calling from Bellegarde," he said to Laguarde at the other side of the desk. "They got him all right. This time his name was De Chartier, and his accomplice was young and pretty instead of old and fat as at Modane. The dog was not a Peke but a King Charles—anyway, that repulsive sort of lapdog that wears an overcoat. And, of course, the dog's coat was padded, not only with cotton-wool, but with one and a half million francs' worth of cocaine."

"Good heavens, so you were right. And what was in the false bottom this time?"

"Our dear Prioux is smart, all right. A round dozen of the best Swiss watches. If we hadn't tumbled to his tricks Courtot would have thought that quite a haul."

Laguarde nodded.

"So simple, really. But if you hadn't looked through the old dossiers and found the circumstance somewhat remarkable that each time Prioux was found to carry some contraband there was a fellow passenger with a lapdog in the same compartment—" He paused, smiling.

Chabrol finished for him.

". . . notre cher Prioux would now gladly be serving his six months in the clink and later be collecting his share of the proceeds!"

"Collecting it at the Rouen pet shop, I suppose?"

"Quite," said Aristide Chabrol, and lit another *Gauloise*.

THE SAINT'S *becoming famous for its great short novels—watch for the exciting mystery,* MURDER WITH FLOWERS *by* Q. PATRICK—*in an early issue.*

the look-out man

by . . . Nicolas Bentley

It's the little things that count, the observant quirks of a lively imagination—if you'd set yourself up as an amateur detective.

MY NAME is William Morris. No relation to the famous one, however—my folks came from Salford. I shall be fifty-three this year. I am married, with one daughter—also married—and I live at Woldingham in Surrey. I am what you would call one of the quiet sort, I suppose. My life may not seem very exciting to some people. But that is the way I like to lead it.

I am fond of reading, being truthfully able to say there is enough excitement for me in books and I like painting—only water-colors as yet—and doing odds and ends about the house. So perhaps there is a bit of the other Morris in me after all. He was fond of doing odd jobs too.

Although I am such a great reader I had never thought of writing anything until this great event in my life happened and I felt I had to record it. So I must ask you to grin and bear it if my shortcomings as an author appear too obvious.

For more than thirty years I have made a study of detective fiction. But I do not read trash, and, Heaven knows, there is

Yes, it's the quiet, observant lads in modest, brightly lighted shops on narrow village streets and in pubs and buses who most often set crime on its head with arms akimbo—as English mystery story writer Nicolas Bentley so persuasively convinces us in this ingenious, small saga.

enough of that about. Poe and Collins and Gaboriau, and of course Holmes, and later on Trent and Dr. Thorndyke were what shaped my taste for detective stories. And what *I* call detective stories are ones that deal with real detection, where the detective is not just a kind of superman but an ordinary one who has nothing but sharp eyes and common sense to rely on.

Consequently I think I have learned to look more closely at my fellow men than most people usually do. But it is not out of curiosity. It is for what it can teach a keen observer about human nature in general. After all, it is the same method as bird-watchers use, and it seems to me you can tell as much about a publican as a pelican if you look at him long enough.

I seldom go in a bus or train or anywhere without learning something about the people around me that you might easily miss at first glance. I like to study—quite unobtrusively, of course—the details and the state of their clothing, their hands and teeth and hair and their jewelry—if any—and spectacles and fountain-pens and so on, and what they are reading or carrying, and the way they talk and walk. You cannot make much out of a single fact, of course, but put two facts together and you may have enough to hang a man on.

I expect my deductions are often quite wrong. I seldom have any means of proving them. But at any rate they keep my imagination more lively than doing crosswords, and for the interest I get they are a lot more profitable to me than doing the pools, of that I am sure.

Every day as I come up in the train—I work at Regnier's, the antique jewelers in Knightsbridge—I sit and look. But I have never had to put my powers of observation to the test, except when we had this trouble in the shop.

The morning it happened we had been open about half an hour. The shop is quite small. It has one counter on the left of the door and another smaller one at right angles; and Mr. Regnier has his office in a little room at the back. We have a very fine stock of old jewelry, but naturally we do not display much of this, except in the window which is well protected.

We carry also a big range of *objets d'art,* Faberge and Cloisonne articles, small carvings, crystal, jade and so on, and these are what we have on show. The only assistants are Miss Susskind and I. The repairs man works off the premises, and Mr. Regnier only attends special customers and big buyers.

The first thing I do in the mornings is to re-dress the window—we always clear it at

night—and on this particular morning I happened to notice a girl looking in the window of the undertaker's opposite. Though beyond a couple of urns and a photo of a hearse there cannot have been much to interest a girl, and I remember wondering about this at the time.

The reason I noticed her—I do not usually notice girls; they are all one to me nowadays, except as subjects of disinterested speculation—was because of her overcoat. It was a long yellow coat with big brown checks. And she had long yellow hair as well. She was what you would call distinctly an arty type—no hat and low heels, and, I should imagine, principles that were not much higher, from the general look of her.

I watched her for a little while, then I was interrupted by a customer. He was one of those gum-chewing Americans, but quite quiet in his looks, except for the pattern of his tie, which looked more like an accident than a design. I should have said he was between thirty-five and forty. He had a very smooth-looking pink face and was rather a big man.

He came straight in and asked to see some rings. I brought out a couple of trays, just to get some idea of the sort of thing he was after. But I could soon see he knew nothing about antique jewelry; nor anything else antique, I imagined, unless it came out of a botttle.

He asked the price of several rings and picked up two or three, and it was then I noticed he was completely left-handed. I could tell straight off he knew nothing whatever about stones or settings. The only thing he seemed to judge them by was the price.

There was one ring, early seventeenth-century, diamonds and rubies in a floral motif, and my word, it was a beauty! Mr. Regnier was so fond of it he did not really want to part with it, so he had put a fancy price on it. It was too fancy for this American, anyway. Not that he could tell the finer rings from those not absolutely of the first water.

Finally there were three trays on the counter in front of him and he still could not make up his mind. Then he spotted a fourth tray in the safe, which was open just behind me, and asked if he could see that too. So I got it out for him, but even before I had laid it on the counter I spotted that the diamond and ruby floral pattern had walked.

I felt quite stunned—and embarrassed. It had never happened to me before, not in all my seventeen years, that anything in my charge had vanished.

I put down the tray and I made a signal to Miss Susskind with my eyebrows. She came over, and when she was close

enough to bear me witness I said to the customer, and hard it was for me to keep my voice steady: "You have decided on the floral ring, have you, sir? If you will just let me have it, I will find a box for it."

I held out my hand. The American said, and I remember exactly his words: "I haven't decided anything. Why, I just want to pick a couple or so for my wife to choose from. Then I'll have her come in later on."

What I said exactly I do not now recall, except that it was something to gain time so I could collect myself. I am seldom at my best when taken unawares. Miss Susskind—she is no fool—slipped off at once to fetch Mr. Regnier. I came round from behind the counter and began looking everywhere, so did the customer. Miss Susskind and Mr. Regnier, too, when they came in.

Of course, Mr. Regnier was in a state. He is rather an excitable man, but overcomes it as a rule because he places a high premium on his dignity. The American did not like it when Mr. Regnier began to warm up. There were no *accusations*, of course—that would never do—but for one minute I thought that things were about to become rather ugly.

Then Miss Susskind—why she of all people should think of it I don't know—suggested he should look in his turn-ups. Instead he looked at her, very hard. His face had gone quite red, or so it seemed to me. He had left off chewing and his jaw was set like a trap. From his expression he would like to have caught Miss Susskind's leg in it. But he bent down and felt all round his turn-ups all the same, without any result. Then he burst out laughing.

Sense of humor is not my strong point, I realize that, but even I could see that at this moment Miss Susskind on all fours was legitimate food for a smile.

Then the American said, "Why, damn it, I guess you think I've stolen it or something!"

Of course, faced with such a statement Mr. Regnier had to demur. He got up off the carpet and asked the customer, very politely, to step into the office. There—he told me afterwards—he put it quite straight to him that, while he did not for one moment suspect him of theft, he must, for insurance purposes, satisfy himself that the ring had not accidentally got into any crease or cranny of his clothing.

It appears the customer was quite good-natured and understanding about it, or seemed to be, and stripped right down for Mr. Regnier, even to his socks and shoes. But there was not a trace of the ring anywhere.

Miss Susskind and I went looking for it meanwhile, not that I was in very high hopes.

It had gone so swift and suddenly I could not help but feel suspicious. While we were still looking, another customer came in. And who should she be but the girl I had seen not ten minutes since looking into the undertaker's window. There was no reason really why I should have felt surprised, but I did feel it was a coincidence.

Close-to there were several little tell-tale things, her hair and her gloves and bag, which all looked just a little bit on the shabby side, nothing noticeable really. She was quite a lady. It is very seldom we get in anybody who looks even at all worn at the edges, if you follow; and ten to one, if they do, they want to sell, not to buy.

The girl pulled off her glove and took out a little tissue paper packet from her bag and laid it on the counter. I at once noticed her fingers. They were unusually short and capable-looking for a woman. She wore no wedding-ring. Her nails were carelessly varnished, and there was a split seam in the forefinger of the right glove.

I undid the packet and in it there was a cheap paste bracelet.

She said to me: "Could you mend this for me? The clasp seems to have broken."

"I am sorry, madam," I said, "we do not do repairs." And neither do we, not that sort of junk.

She hesitated, as though not sure what to do next. Then she just shrugged and said, "Thank you."

And then—it was very clever the way she did it—her bag just sort of accidentally touched the tissue paper and it slipped off my side of the counter.

As I stooped down to pick it up I had what I can only regard as a revelation. Everything seemed suddenly clear to me, as though the various bits of a wire puzzle had suddenly slipped into their right places and solved the puzzle for me.

I say everything was clear, but was it? I was certainly not very clear about how to act. At all costs I knew Mr. Regnier would want no scene in the shop. My heart really was in my mouth as I rose up slowly from behind that counter, and no doubt I looked it. I wrapped the bracelet up in the tissue paper and handed it back.

The girl put it in her bag, and as she turned to go I said to her: "One moment, please." But she acted as if she had not heard. So I said quickly, but, of course, quite politely: "Excuse me, madam, if you do not stop, I shall be compelled to press the alarm and that door in front of you will be locked automatically." Half-way through I had to swallow. I was so very strung up.

She did stop then, but she

did not turn round. Miss Susskind, behind the other counter, stood there like Lot's wife with glasses on.

I came round to the girl and I said: "We do not want any unpleasantness, madam, either of us. So if you will just hand over the ring in your left-hand overcoat pocket the matter will be settled as far as we are concerned. If not, Miss Susskind here will press the alarm."

Miss Susskind nodded when I said this. I could see she was keen to press it anyway.

The girl had gone very pale. I really felt almost sorry for her for the moment, but I knew I had to be firm. She looked at me very frightened, then she handed over the ring and ran straight out of the shop. And at that very minute Mr. Regnier came back out of the office with the American customer fully dressed.

The customer was looking all smiles, as though the whole episode was more or less a joke to him. But it was by no means a joke to Mr. Regnier. He was all apologies, not smiles. Then I opened my hand and showed them the ring, and you should have seen Mr. Regnier's face, what with seeing his precious ring once more and then seeing the American go flying out of the shop as though a stone from a catapult.

Well, of course, Mr. Regnier wondered how on earth I had done it, so I explained.

First of all, we very seldom get any customers like this type of American. Something flashy and more modernistic than our style of jewelry would have been more in his line. He had no taste and what often goes with it—no idea what he really wanted. Most people who come to us come because they know that at Regnier's you can get the sort of things you cannot just pick up anywhere. So Query No. One in my mind—not that I had actually got any suspicions up to that moment—was why on earth should he have come to us?

Second point: this was about the girl. Why should anyone hang about in front of an undertaker's? Of course, at this stage I did not associate the girl with the American customer at all. Either one is in need of an undertaker or one is not. It is not a matter that leaves room for doubt in the mind of the ordinary citizen. So what was this girl doing hanging about in front of the undertaker's? The answer was clear to me. She was killing time. But what for? If her intention was to come to us, why dally in front of an undertaker?

And then the cheap-looking thing she had brought in for repair. She looked as if she knew what was what, and she was a lady all right. She must have

known very well we are not the kind of business that does cheap repairs. All this passed through my mind as I looked at her bracelet.

Point Three was this: there was nothing left-handed about her, I had noticed that. Yet it was the *left*-hand glove she had pulled off when she came in, though she had undone the tissue paper packet with her right. It was at the small counter, and really this counter is only wide enough for one person to stand at conveniently. The last thing I remembered, as I bent down to pick up the tissue paper, was seeing this girl's left hand at just about the spot where the American had placed his—of course, he was truly left-handed —after I had taken the tray of rings from the safe.

And finally, there was one thing more that had stuck in my mind. It stuck rather far back till the critical moment came. When we had all been crawling about on the carpet, and the American customer had looked so cross at Miss Susskind, I remembered noticing he had stopped chewing his gum.

Well, you do not just spit gum out on the carpet, even if you are the type of person he was, and he had not moved a foot either way from where he was standing. So ipso facto he must have disposed of the gum somewhere within reach, because there was no waste-paper basket, nothing, nowhere he could have got rid of it without one of us noticing. Nowhere, that is, *except* right underneath the ledge of the counter.

And that is where I looked for the gum and where I found it just as the girl was about to go out of the shop. And there was the mark on it as clean as a die where the ring had been pressed into it.

It is a funny thing the way different people get differently affected by the same things. Mr. Regnier was in such a state, angry, yet most grateful to me that I really felt quite touched, and could hardly speak when I told him how the whole thing had happened.

Miss Susskind does not speak much anyway, except to say "Tck, tck," which she says a hundred times a day if she says it once. And that is exactly what she said.

She did not even smile.

I suppose I ought to be ashamed to admit it, a man of my age. But when I had finished explaining to Mr. Regnier, not only were my hands wringing wet but I could not stop myself quivering all over for quite a while afterwards.

Why, do you suppose?

the cigarette of death

by . . . Hugh Wiley

"One cigarette before I die!" was James Lee's plea. To the Russian it seemed unlikely that a smoke ring could tighten into a noose.

AT MIDNIGHT, Jane Young said to James Lee over the telephone, "They will kill him!" Her voice was thin with fear. "I know they will kill him, Mr. Lee. You must do something to save him!"

"Come down to my apartment at once," James Lee directed. "No more of this over the wire."

"I will be there in ten minutes."

A moment later, James Lee was talking to his assistant, Frank Wilbur, over the wire. "Walter Young has disappeared," he said. "We were discussing him last week, remember? The millionaire insurance man—"

"Yes, I remember," Wilbur said. "I met him during that insurance racket crusade. What's the play?"

"Come over to my apartment and we'll get to work. Mrs. Young is on her way here now. I want you to sit in."

In his library, after he had introduced Frank Wilbur he turned to Jane Young, and

---

Armchair adventure may be quite beguilingly enchanting and remote from reality, or it may be so harsh, frightening and immediate that it seems to be happening right before your eyes in a room hazy with gunsmoke. But when a story is written with unsparing honesty the very harshness takes on an exciting quality we wouldn't trade for all the security on earth. Hugh Wiley whose ruggedly realistic crime yarns featuring the spirited James Lee have appeared frequently in COLLIER'S *scores here a veritable double bull's-eye.*

Copyright, 1940, by Hugh Wiley.
Originally published as "THE ROOM OF DEATH"

spoke without evasion. "Why do you think your husband is in danger?" He noticed that her hands were trembling. "May I get you a drink?" he asked, solicitously.

Jane Young compressed her lips. "Thank you, no. I'm quite all right. But I'm sure that something terrible has happened to Walter. I've always known that some of those desperate men would kill him."

"What desperate men?" James Lee asked. "Please take your time and tell the story."

"Walter has sent fifty of them to the penitentiary in the last ten years—firebugs and wreckers and insurance killers. Some of them have been released. I know they have him. He's probably being tortured. I've warned him a hundred times. So has Mason Romer."

"Who is Mason Romer?" James Lee asked.

"His secretary. He's rather arrogant and stupid, but he knows everything about Walter's affairs."

James Lee nodded to Frank Wilbur. "Get Mr. Romer in here right away," he directed. To Jane Young he said: "Has your husband received any threats lately?"

"I don't know. Walter used to show me the most terrible letters, but he stopped that. They frightened me."

"You will forgive the next question," James Lee said. "Was Mr. Young interested in another woman?"

Jane Young flushed, then shook her head decisively. "Absurd! I know there was no one else. I'm positive of that."

"That complicates things," James Lee reflected. Then, aloud, "When was Mr. Young last seen?"

"We had a dinner engagement in Burlingame for seven o'clock. He usually spends an hour or two at his club before he comes home, but he was not in the club tonight. He left his office at one o'clock and that's the last we have heard of him."

Her voice faltered.

"Mr. Romer will know about his engagements?"

"Of course."

"Did your husband drive his own car?"

"His car is still in the Central Garage, half a block from his office."

"Why haven't you turned the case over to the police?"

Jane Young's face grew more strained. "Because his captors might kill him if it became public."

James Lee's next question was softly spoken. "Why do you assume that he has not yet been killed?"

"Because he is worth more to his enemies alive than dead," Jane said, and her eyes did not waver.

"Why do you think his captors are holding him for ransom?"

"Because they are the kind of men who would do just that."

"You seem to know who they are. Unless you are reasonably sure of their identity, your ideas may complicate our work."

"I see what you mean, Mr. Lee. But I don't know who they are, with any certainty. I was thinking of a gang of insurance murderers that Walter sent to the penitentiary ten years ago. One of them, the most desperate, was released last week."

"Who is he?" James Lee asked.

"His name was Sears. He had other names. Mason Romer will tell you all about it." Terror suddenly clouded Jane Young's eyes. "Mr. Lee, I'm afraid my husband is dead!"

"No—he's probably alive," James Lee said, with quiet confidence. "Maybe you had better return to your home. I will call you after I get through with Romer. Let me take you to your car."

When he put Jane Young in her car, he pressed her hand reassuringly. "We will do everything that can be done to find your husband. Please go straight to your home. I will telephone you after I have talked with Mr. Romer."

Jane Young started her car. When she was half a block down the street, driving well enough, James Lee turned toward the dimly lighted entrance to his apartment.

In the shadowed doorway, as the door swung open, he felt the searing pain of a bullet plowing through the flesh of his left forearm. The same instant he heard the smoking explosion of two pistol shots directly across the street. He slammed the door from the inside. Then he saw a splintered bit of frame where the second shot, missing its mark, had struck.

Ten feet ahead of him, against the baseboard of the entrance hall, he saw the little battered projectile. He picked it up, still hot.

In the library of his apartment, he said to Frank Wilbur: "First you'd better help me dress and bandage my arm. Then I want you to size this up, and tell me about the gun that fired it."

Frank Wilbur scowled at the blood dripping from James Lee's left elbow.

"Flesh wound," James Lee said. "Let's get a dressing on it before Romer shows up."

"Who did it?"

"Some third-rate gunman from across the street. He shot me right after I put Mrs. Young into her car."

Frank Wilbur's examination of the pistol bullet was interrupted for a moment when Mason Romer arrived at James

Lee's apartment. The visitor, evidently none too pleased at having his night disturbed, replied to Wilbur's greeting with a question. "What's all the excitement?"

"Sit down, Mr. Romer," Lee invited. "I'm sorry that we had to disturb you, but the occasion seemed to justify it."

Mason Romer lighted a cigarette. "What occasion, may I ask?"

"Your chief's disappearance," James Lee answered shortly. "Walter Young has vanished. There are reasons to suspect that he is in serious danger."

Romer yawned. "What makes you think he's in danger?" he asked coolly. "He's probably barging around on some new reform mission. Under cover."

"His wife fears that he is dead," James Lee said. "What do you know about an insurance killer by the name of Sears?"

"Mr. Young socked him ten or twelve years ago," Romer answered. "Sears was mixed up with several killings. He was released a week ago."

"Do you know of any threats that Sears made against Walter Young?"

"Once or twice during the trial he threatened to kill him. Lots of people threaten Mr. Young. . . . May I ask, Mr. Lee, if you have any other reasons for fearing foul play except Mrs. Young's story? She's a bit flighty in that respect, you know."

For a moment James Lee considered the increasingly painful wound in his left arm. "Yes," he said, "I have other reasons for believing that Mr. Young may be in serious trouble." His voice sharpened. "Who would kill him, Mr. Romer? Who were his enemies?"

Mason Romer deliberated before he replied. Then, in a somewhat pompous tone, he said: "A crusader with Mr. Young's enthusiasm creates many enemies. He's been fighting arsonists and accident fakers and wreckers for many years."

"What kind of wreckers?"

"Crooked shipowners. Mr. Young handles marine insurance with his other interests. He virtually owns half a dozen ships—the Silver Stack Line has them under lease."

"I don't follow you," James Lee said. "Do you imply that his interest in the Silver Stack Line involves physical danger to Mr. Young?"

"Possibly," Romer said. "His board of directors—"

"Just a moment," Lee interrupted. Frank Wilbur had slipped in from the laboratory and had placed a penciled note on his chief's desk. "Pardon me, Mr. Romer."

James Lee scanned Wilbur's report on the bullet. "Caliber close to decimal point, three

thirty-one. Weight checks with nothing in the American or foreign records. It must be a new type of gun—maybe home-made?"

"You can speak freely, Wilbur. Mr. Romer might be of great help to us. Notice anything else about the bullet?"

"Well, the tin percentage is away up. Looks like Malay metal."

"That settles it!" said James Lee. "That bullet was fired from one of the new Russian automatics from a very busy factory in the Urals. I got a confidential bulletin on that automatic recently."

He turned to Mason Romer. "This narrows things down somewhat. Mr. Romer, have Walter Young's activities ever brought him into any contact with agents of the Soviet Union?"

Romer smiled in a superior way. "That's just what I was about to mention before we were interrupted. The board of directors of the Silver Stack Line wants to sell all its ships to a South American line for a good price. We suspect the line is Soviet controlled. Mr. Young has opposed this in the face of considerable pressure."

Frank Wilbur whistled softly as he saw the grim look on Lee's face. The visitor rose.

"However, if I may say so," he remarked, "you are probably barking up the wrong tree, and Mr. Young is safe at home by this time. Why don't you call him and find out?"

James Lee reached for the telephone and called Walter Young's residence number. A drowsy servant answered him.

"Let me speak to Mr. Young."

"Mr. Young is not at home."

"Let me speak to Mrs. Young."

"Mrs. Young has not returned."

"Thank you," James Lee said. He hung up and faced Mason Romer.

"This gets more serious every minute," he said crisply. "Mrs. Young has had plenty of time to reach her home, but something must have happened on the way. Your information has been very useful, Mr. Romer. Just before you arrived I was hit by a shot from a pistol made in the U. S. S. R. Now you tell me that Soviet agents have more than a little to gain by removing Walter Young, who has been missing since one o'clock this afternoon. No more time must be lost!"

"Where are you going?" Frank Wilbur asked Lee.

"I'm going to see if Sung Ying can help us. It's a long chance—but we have no time for routine methods. He's the one man in the whole city who might put us on the trail of the enemy. Telephone Sung Ying

that I'm coming over to have a talk with him."

"Why not tell him to come here?" Wilbur suggested. "You've been shot once tonight."

"We can't waste a moment. It will be too late."

"Then at least let me go with you."

"Stay here," James Lee ordered," and after you tell Sung Ying that I'm on my way, stick close to the phone. Mr. Romer will keep you company."

"But—but I'm not staying here, sir!" blustered Romer. "You have no right—"

James Lee shook his head. "I've no time to explain. But I will say that if you leave this apartment you may be in great danger of your life. Mrs. Young left here a short time ago, and has not been heard of since. If I work fast I might be able to save her from death—but I cannot permit you to take a similar chance!"

Disregarding the outraged protests of his guest, James Lee left his apartment.

The streets were almost deserted at this hour, and in the five blocks of his journey toward Grant Avenue, Lee encountered but three pedestrians. When he reached the central section of the colony of his countrymen, he proceeded along the colorful thoroughfare until he reached Jackson Street. He turned to the left here and walked up the hill until he came to a narrow door between the Smiling Friend Pawnshop and the jewelry store operated by Sung Ying, chief of the Pacific Division of the Chinese Nationalists Intelligence Service. He knocked lightly once on the door, and it was immediately opened to admit him.

"I need your counsel and advice," he said, in greeting. "I have a problem in your field, Sung Ying. Walter Young has disappeared."

"The president of the Silver Stack Line?" asked Sung Ying. "I know him. That is serious. Let us go into my office."

James Lee preceded him into the small room.

"How can I help you?" asked Sung Ying.

"Walter Young has various enemies, but I have good reason to believe that his present peril comes from Soviet agents in San Francisco, because of his firm opposition to the sale of his ships to a line which is almost certainly under communist control. Does that strike you as being motive enough for getting rid of him?"

Sung Ying's eyes narrowed. "More than enough!" he said. "Jalowski and Kalletin are operating in this district. They are killers. When did Young disappear?"

"At least six hours ago."

"Then they have probably finished him by this time," Sung

Ying said. "Jalowski has tried to kill me three times. He would not spare Walter Young. And Kalletin is even more ruthless."

"Where can I find these murderous ones?"

"Jalowski will be in Chun Wong's house on Post Street. My men have not seen Kalletin for two days. Chun Wong is a very good friend of the enemies of Nationalist China. His very skin glows red."

"Chun Wong's house—the grocery store, do you mean?" James Lee asked. "I know the place. Why haven't you finished with this Jalowski?"

"He has escaped me twice. He is a fox. And Kalletin is a gray Siberian wolf."

"I may help to kill him?" James Lee requested. "You will forgive me if I offer my aid?"

"It is about time that we were rid of him," Sung Ying said. "I will be delighted to accompany you."

"I cannot express my gratitude. Tell me—if Jalowski and Kalletin have captured Walter Young and Mrs. Young, would they hold them in Chun Wong's house—kill them there?"

"Undoubtedly. Dead men are awkward property. Chun Wong has a clever way of getting rid of them."

"How is that?"

"The empty fish boxes," Sung Ying explained. "There is a fish market in the rear of his grocery store. The empty boxes are returned to the waterfront fishermen each day. At least ten of Chun Wong's victims have been buried in the night, miles at sea. Wait until I get my coat—and a pair of guns—and we will see if we can solve your problem. Are you armed?"

"Yes," James Lee said. "One moment, my dear friend. I must let my office know where we are going, so that they can follow through on this if we fail."

When he had Frank Wilbur on the line, he said: "Sung Ying and I are going to Chun Wong's house on Post Street. We should be in the clear within an hour. If you do not hear from me, get hold of Riley and look things over."

"I still think I should come with you," Wilbur protested.

"Stay where you are. Is Romer all right?"

"He's gone to sleep in his chair. He's a funny customer."

"Good! Now, check your time—two-thirteen—and if I don't call you within an hour, follow up with Riley."

James Lee hung up the phone and turned to Sung Ying. "If anything happens to us, we temporize with Chun Wong for an hour, until Wilbur blasts his way in with the rescue party. Let's go!"

Nearing Chun Wong's house, Sung Ying advised, "Park the

car here. We'll walk the next two blocks."

"Right. Have you been inside of Chun Wong's house before?"

"No. I have been in the store. It is a three-story building, you remember, but our job is on the ground floor or below that. What do you suggest if we suddenly discover that I am unable to talk them into opening the apartment door?"

"We shoot the lock off and go ahead," James Lee said. "The lives of innocent people are at stake."

At the doorway of Chun Wong's house, Sung Ying rang the bell twice before a thin voice piped through the battered tin speaking tube set above the bell. "Who calls?"

"Two men of the Service," Sung Ying answered. "Be quick! Open the door!"

"Kalletin?"

Instantly deciding from the question that Kalletin was expected, Sung Ying answered, "Yes. Kalletin and distinguished companion from south office."

The click of two bolts followed. "We have long expected you," spoke the thin voice through the speaking tube. "Enter."

"Great luck!" James Lee whispered to Sung Ying. "They may have held Young alive waiting for the Russians. If they open fire, shoot them down as they come. Keep on my left."

A Chinaman stood at the far end of the hallway before an open door. As the two marched forward into the dim light of an exposed bulb, something suspicious in their movements must have made the man realize his error. A deafening roar sounded in the hall, and a wild bullet smashed the light overhead.

"Down him!" James Lee directed.

Sung Ying fired twice at the silhouette of the gunman in the doorway. The man went down.

Instantly, from beyond the lighted doorway there lifted a cackling chorus of voices.

"We lose," James Lee said. "No chance, but keep your guns going."

He leaped through the doorway, firing as he went. A man faced him with a swinging automatic. James Lee's shot brought him down. Two others were shooting wildly. Lee's gun knocked one of them over, Sung Ying got the other. Then, out of the shadows in the corner of the room, there came a single explosion and the weapon dropped from Sung Ying's nerveless left hand. James Lee fired quickly and the Russian sprawled on his face.

"That is Jalowski," Sung Ying said. "Good work! Chun Wong is dead there by the door."

"Kalletin?"

"Not here," Sung Ying said. "Remember—he was only ex-

pected. Come, through this door! There may be others."

The inner door of the room was locked. James Lee fired once through the lock, and turned to his companion. He saw for the first time that Sung Ying was seriously wounded. Flowing blood stained the left side of Sung Ying's coat.

"Let me go first," Sung Ying said. "I'll last for a while yet."

James Lee blocked the way with his tortured arm. "You are badly hurt," he objected. "If they get me, do your best."

He slipped his empty automatic into his coat pocket and reached for his second gun that he carried in a shoulder holster. He kicked the door open. Save for two occupants, Walter Young and his wife, gagged and wired to their chairs, the room was empty.

"We win!" James Lee whispered. "They're alive!"

"Held for Kalletin's coming," Sung Ying faltered.

"You are in bad shape, my friend. Do you think you could bear up for just a few moments longer?"

"I will do my best," said Sung Ying.

Jane Young, unconscious, was barely breathing. James Lee tore the padded cloth from her mouth. Color came to her ashen face as he turned to perform the same quick service for her husband. Walter Young gulped the smoke-laden air for a moment, and then, falteringly, "Is she dead?" he cried.

In that busy minute, James Lee was unaware that behind him his countryman, who had sadly misjudged his strength, was slipping quietly to the floor. Collapsing from the pain of his wound, Sung Ying lay across the threshold.

"Mrs. Young is breathing," James Lee said, turning again to the problem of breaking the twisted wires that bound the woman to her chair. "She will be all right when—"

A strange voice from the doorway interrupted him.

"Good evening, Mr. Lee. You've saved me a great deal of trouble by coming to die here. I am Kalletin."

James Lee whirled to face the invader. The Russian, smiling, stood in the doorway with a leveled automatic.

"If you please, do not touch the wire on the hands of the lady."

"Kalletin!" James Lee saw in a flash that here was death.

"Kalletin, yes! It is an honor to meet the famous James Lee. I am grateful to you for coming here to die, and saving me the trouble of finding you." Kalletin walked into the room, glancing down at the unconscious Sung Ying as he stepped daintily over the body of the wounded man.

"Everything is finished now. You have had very bad luck."

Five feet away from James Lee, Kalletin steadied the automatic for the shot that meant the end of life for his opponent.

With death but one brief moment ahead of him, James Lee smiled at the Russian. "A cigarette?" he temporized. "One cigarette before I die. It is your generous custom, as I remember."

Kalletin nodded. "One cigarette, yes," he consented. "One cigarette and some conversation. But do not move your hand fast, please."

James Lee reached for a cigarette and lighted it. As he struck the match, he saw, back of Kalletin, the fingers of Sung Ying's right hand close convulsively in a subconscious gesture inspired by the sound of the Russian's hated voice. Sung Ying's eyelids fluttered. Then, with his eyes open, his right hand moved toward the weapon that he had dropped at the moment of his collapse.

James Lee, fearful that Kalletin might read some evidence of Sung Ying's awakening in Walter Young's eye or actions, held his lighted cigarette away from him and regarded its glowing tip.

"Thank you for this blessing of tobacco," he said to Kalletin. "If you will permit me to enjoy a little more of it?"

"Enjoy it by all means," Kalletin said. "Why did you come here, Mr. Lee? Certainly you are a very large fool, far more of a fool than Sung Ying. James Lee, a Chinese man. Russians are much smarter than Chinese men. I am an old man, but you, James Lee are a very young child."

Sung Ying's fingers had closed on his automatic.

Without evident effort, James Lee compelled himself to address Kalletin in an even voice. "It is true," he said, "that your discernment in this instance has merit. I admit that you enjoy a certain temporary superiority—"

Sung Ying's automatic inched up in line with the Russian's heart.

Kalletin smiled at James Lee. "First," he said, "I shall close the door so that no one will hear the shot." With his gun still leveled at James Lee's heart, Kalletin edged toward the door.

James Lee realized that another backward step would bring Sung Ying within range of the Russian's vision.

"This cigarette—" he began. "You promised me that I might enjoy—"

The crash of Sung Ying's gun ended the sentence. Kalletin, dead before he fell, left life with his eyes searching in wonderment for a reason why his heart had suddenly exploded under the impact of the bullet from a dead man's gun.

"Oh, good man!" James Lee exclaimed, smiling at Sung Ying as he leaped toward the open door. "Play the game, giant of courage, for one more small moment, until I return!"

Over a telephone, three minutes after Kalletin had died, James Lee spoke to Frank Wilbur. "A surgeon and an ambulance, quick, to Chun Wong's house on Post Street," he said. "Sung Ying is hurt."

"And you?"

"I'm all right," James Lee said. "Young and his wife are safe. Bring Riley with you. There may be some more bad actors drifting in."

"I'll be there in five minutes. Mason Romer just woke up. He wants to know if anything has happened yet."

James Lee frowned. "Tell Mr. Romer he is free to go home to bed," he said. "That's where I'd like to be myself. It's been a rather crowded evening!"

THE SAINT OFFERS—NEXT MONTH—THESE HEADLINERS

THE WICKED COUSIN by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE INDISCRETION OF LETTY SHAW by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

EXPRESS TO DANGER by MIGNON G. EBERHART

PREMIERE OF MURDER by FREDRIC BROWN

BEHIND THE STAR by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

THE PHONOGRAPH MURDER by HELEN REILLY

INFORMATION OBTAINED by WILLIAM MACHARG

the seven curses

by Samuel Hopkins Adams

He lay injured and helpless in the shadow of a house men feared to enter, an unwilling witness to the darkest of human dramas.

TIME IS OF small concern to a dead man, and such I considered myself to be. The total lack of sensation in my legs, both of which seemed to be broken, was terrifyingly convincing. It might have been one hour or twenty that I lay propped amidst the shrubbery, staring helplessly into the darkness. Then, slowly, my mind cleared—cleared and filled with the horror, not of death, indeed, but of dying under the vacant windows of Slocum House, deep-shadowed, massive and brooding in the moonlight over the secret of its continuous tragedy.

Voices just at moonrise had given me hope. A car had stopped in the road above the embankment, and there was talk, between two men, of a flat tire. One of the speakers I recognized readily enough by his accents as my friend, Dr. Vernam—the health officer of the county. The voice of the other rasped obscurely on my memory.

"I hold you responsible, Vernam, for the safety of the house.

A mystery story in broodingly somber apparel by so distinguished a literary craftsman as Samuel Hopkins Adams is an occasion for the ringing of welkins by devotees of the excitingly unusual in crime fiction. For Mr. Adams's novels have not only added luster to best-seller lists for three decades, they have glorified reckless youth in a manner quite audacious. As if to prove that he can weave spells of darker magic as well the author of PLUNDER *has dipped his pen here in inks of vitriolic hue.*

Copyright, 1931, by Samuel Hopkins Adams

You seem to forget that there's a hundred thousand dollars' worth of movable property in there. If it was properly guarded—"

"And you choose to forget how effectively it *is* guarded," was the confident, slightly testy reply. "The police will not be needed—"

"So you claim," said the other, and by the peculiarly individual vehemence of his voice I knew him for Silas Slocum, founder of the ill-famed dwelling.

"Tonight I assume full responsibility for the place," said Vernam. "Tomorrow you may, if you choose, return and look after it yourself."

"I suppose you and the townspeople would be glad to see me the seventh one," said the old man, his voice rising in anger.

"I'm afraid," replied the doctor, with a shade of contempt, "that men like you, who despise every human law, are the very ones who live in constant, unreasoning terror of the superhuman."

"You lie!" said Slocum. "I'm afraid of nothing—not woman or devil. Mind you, Vernam, I'll let no man take such liberty of speech with me."

"Move over," said the other, indifferently. "You're leaving me no room."

The car rattled, and I was left alone. In my tormented isolation my thoughts returned again to Slocum House, overspread, as by some noisome ivy-growth, with swift-creeping legends of the countryside. Founded and built on the proceeds of corruption, it had prospered only in the rank externals of existence. Its first mistress had sickened and died twenty-five years after her marriage, leaving six dour, secretive, bad-tempered children. The youngest of these was older than the second wife whom Silas Slocum had brought home the following year.

In all that house of mystery nothing was so inexplicable as her presence there. How so gracious a woman could have hoped to find happiness wedded to a man as self-centered, and coldly self-seeking as Silas Slocum, the most far-reaching conjecture failed to suggest. Swiftly enough her grace had faded in that environment and tales of persecution, vague and sinister, had spread from the remote little valley to become the topic of town discussion at Dormerskill, the nearest village, four miles away.

In all of those tales the entire family of six were in varying degrees involved, but the ugliest whispers gave a special emphasis and significance to the names of Silas Slocum, the father, and Martin Slocum, the youngest son.

Then, rumor took form and substance and became tragically somber fact. Slocum's wife had

fled the house one bitter November night, and had come, scantily clad and in delirium, to the village, babbling of inhuman treatment. Her husband had followed her.

Her face livid with hate, and in the presence of Dr. Vernam, she had cursed the house of Slocum to his face; cursed his six sons, from Daniel, the eldest, to Martin, who had just turned nineteen. The mansion itself, she vowed should be the instrument of her vengeance.

"She has a very high fever and does not realize what she is saying," explained Dr. Vernam. "But you must not take her back. I will not answer for the consequences if you do."

"My wife returns with me!" insisted Silas Slocum.

And so she went. A few months later, she died.

After her went the Slocum brood. Silas, himself exempt from the letter of the curse, had seen death take its steady relentless toll: two in the year following his wife's burial, the eldest in the second year, and another the succeeding winter. The fifth had died but a week ago, gaunt and fever-wracked.

One only had thus far escaped. Martin, the youngest son, after a bitter quarrel with his father, had been forced to seek his livelihood in another city. A year before death had left him the lone survivor. Would he too return to struggle unavailingly against the mysterious and inexplicable Slocum curse?

I stared through the gloom.

Presently I became aware of a small, very animated object moving across the lawn between me, and the building. It was a gray cat, gaunt to the point of emaciation and intent upon prey. Cautiously it skirted the edge of a wild-rose tangle; then stiffened, leaped, and fled, seeking a refuge at the far side of the moonlight space. Apparently something had scared it half out of its wits.

Almost immediately upon the thought, I saw two figures emerge from the tangle and approach the terrace. One of them carried a bag which he laid down within a few yards of me. His companion, a slight, swarthy man with a face I instinctively disliked, coughed and beat his chest with the flat of his hand.

"I'll take a look about," he said breathlessly, "while we're waiting for Bradden."

"Don't you leave me alone here, Vail!" said the other pleadingly. "Don't you do it, man!"

"What's the matter now?" demanded the swarthy man.

"I don't like the looks of this place. Did you see that black cat? They ain't no luck in a black cat, not when it runs right across your path—"

"It wasn't black, you fool! It was gray," said the swarthy man

impatiently. "Damn you, anyway! Eh—what's this?"

He had stumbled over the wreck of my car. There was the flash of a bull's eyes as he felt about in the machinery.

"Cold as ice," he said. "We can be reasonably sure the owner won't be back tonight for the pieces, even if he's not in a hospital or at the undertaker's. What a smash-up!" His voice, though of a singularly unpleasant quality, had the intonations of culture.

But the other was not to be so easily reassured.

"We better scram, Vail," he urged. "Somebody may be here any minute."

"So much the worse for them." The man called Vail thrust his hand into a coat pocket that sagged and bulged into sharp angles. "Do you need to be reminded, George, that I'm 'Mister' Vail?"

"N-n-no!" chattered George. "I forgot."

"Keep your fears to yourself, then! . . . Here's Bradden." Abruptly he swung about. "Well, Terry?"

The newcomer was a squat broad-shouldered man, with deepset eyes that gleamed piercingly sharp in his somewhat narrow face.

"It's a fast-asleep plant," he said. "Nothin' stirrin' anywheres."

"You didn't see a woman in white clothes, Terry?" asked George fearfully.

"No, you fool!" Vail answered for the other.

"What's that about a woman in white?" asked Bradden.

"That's the talk in the town," said George. "They say the ha'nt of a lady walks here. Sometimes five other ha'nts walks with her, waitin' for one more. *Seven Curses,* they calls this house hereabouts!"

Without a word Vail struck George full in the mouth. It was a blow of shocking power, coming, as it did, from one so emaciated.

"Do you think I'm going to have this job fall through because of such superstitious nonsense?" he said sternly. "Get to business."

Shaking and sniveling, George yielded to the other's savage aggressiveness. Fumbling in his bag, he selected a tool.

"It'll be an easy crack," said Bradden, reassuringly. "That window on the end, just over the sunken walk, looks best."

As George moved toward the house over the sloping lawn, his knees wavering, Terry Bradden turned uneasily to Vail. "Do you think there's anything in what George said about the woman?" he asked. "I heard some talk of it myself."

"If there was," said Vail, "I'd crack that crib anyway. I'd crack

it if it was guarded by the Devil himself."

Bradden shrank back, making a swift motion of two fingers.

"Crossing yourself over the job?" sneered Vail.

"Not over the job. It's only a bit of a 'safety' the gypsy folks taught me. You don't need it, bein' a college man. It's different with George an' me. The cards put it on me last time I consulted Madame Astra. 'Evil lurks for you in a strange house,' says the cards."

Vail cursed him viciously. "Am I always to be tied to a pack of shivering superstitious cowards?" he cried.

"Look at the cat!" said Bradden.

Clear in the moonlight the cat stood, having seemingly conquered its alarm. Its luminous eyes followed George, who had clambered, with the briskness of fear, along the coping to the window, upon which he was now expertly busying himself. Vail hurled a clod at the animal, and it bounded into the thicket.

"It probably belongs here and wants to get back into the house," he said.

"Sure," agreed Bradden, his fears mollified.

"There goes the window," said Vail. "Why I don't believe it was even locked! Did you hear any noise?"

"Not a crack. What would that mean, d'you think?"

"It means we're getting a lucky break. Isn't that enough for you?"

Terry Bradden concentrated his attention upon the house. But I could see his powerful shoulders twisting and cringing within his coat.

"Good boy, George," commented Vail. "He goes ahead well, once he gets started."

Indeed, George had pushed up the window smartly enough. Now he entered, and disappeared from view.

Two steps he might have taken within the room, possibly three. Not more. The waiting robbers leaped as a strangled scream came from the house. For myself I heard the shattering of glass before I realized that George, his arms wildly flailing, had been battered with terrifying violence through the heavy pane of the lifted sash.

I saw him leap forward across the sill, and slump, with horrible writhings, into the sunken passage. For a moment thereafter, I thought I heard a light rustling from where he lay, as of a body twitching among dead leaves. Then silence, from within and without the house.

I turned to look at the accomplices. Bradden's sodden face expressed only dumb stupefaction. Vail's was alight with a ghastly surmise. No further sound of movement served to break the spell. Only, from the

sill, two little blackish pools dripped and dwindled.

Suddenly Bradden turned with a strangled cry. But Vail's grip was upon him. "If you try to run, I'll kill you," he warned. "Stay where you are and wait for me."

Revolver in hand, he crossed the open space, the cough that shook his emaciated body forcing him to stop twice in the middle of the lawn, and once close to the house. Just as he reached the house the cat emerged.

Vail cursed angrily and charged it back to cover. That he should have descended into the sunken passage where George lay was more than I could have conceived of flesh and blood. But descend he did. The man's will must have been as rigid as steel, as implacable as flame.

In a moment he was back, his face deathly pale in the moonlight.

"George is done for," he said.

Bradden stared at him glassily. "Done for?" he mumbled. "What's come to him, then?"

"How should I know? There's no mark on him except where the glass slashed his wrists. He's gone—but that leaves more for us to divide."

Bradden began to rock his great body backward and forward. "Evil lurks in a strange house," he moaned.

Vail put a steadying hand on his shoulder.

"We'll die if we stay here!" whimpered Bradden. "There's a ha'nt on this place."

"Haunt or not, there's one hundred thousand dollars to be had in that house."

The whimpering ceased.

"Fifty thousand dollars apiece for a few minutes' work."

"I don't care!" pleaded Bradden, with an absurd and childish pathos. "I couldn't do it, not for all the money in the world. Oh, I wish I could pray!"

"Pray for courage, then, for you're climbing that coping right now." Vail's voice was coldly threatening.

"I'm not going," stammered Terry Bradden. "You can't make me."

"If I had the strength to do it without retching my rotten lungs out, I wouldn't need your help. As it is, I've no choice—"

"I can't!" It was a sob of despair.

"If you can't do it for the money you can do it for your life." The revolver Vail pointed at Bradden glinted in the moonlight.

Bradden, terrified, took a wavering step forward. "Let me look in, first," he pleaded.

"Well," Vail said with icy impatience, "look, then."

"Not from here. What could I see from here? It's that tree over there that'll give me the sight. Then I'll go in. But if I went in first an' saw anything, I'd drop dead in my tracks."

"I believe you would," said Vail, contemptuously. "Well, be quick about it." He touched the revolver. "You know I can shoot straight, for you've seen me kill a man."

"Don't talk about it! Not here!"

"Up with you then!"

Swinging himself into the tree, Terry Bradden peered through the window. Suddenly the sturdy little oak became an aspen through all its leaves, so great was the force of his terror.

"What do you see?"

"Figures!" he choked. His voice was hoarse, starkly incredulous.

"What kind of figures?"

"White figures. In the middle of the room. Six of them—standin' straight and still."

"What?" It was the merest gasping breath from Vail. Instantly he had command of himself, though I could hear him cursing his partner with soft-voiced threats. Cowed by them, Terry Bradden, half tumbling from his perch, scurried across the open, and sprang to the coping. Foot by foot he dragged himself along, the point of the revolver following him. Once he looked down into the passage where the body of his accomplice lay and nearly fell.

"Steady!" came the cool voice of Vail. "There's not a living soul in the place, I tell you."

"It ain't the living I'm afraid of," sobbed Terry. He grasped the sill and turned for one last appeal. "I just can't do it," he moaned.

"One," counted Vail, deliberately. "Two!" I knew, with the certainty of fate, that the next softly uttered number would send a bullet through Terry Bradden, clinging limply now to the wall of Slocum House. And the mind that still flaccidly controlled Bradden's body knew it, too.

I heard a sob. Bradden took a deep breath, cast one despairing look about him and plunged within.

I covered my ears with my hands. But there was, I believe, no outcry. Bradden's arms were crossed over his eyes as he staggered back against the window. The sill caught him at the knees and he toppled and went over, his head striking the masonry edge of the lower wall with a sharp crunch. The body disappeared in the area-way.

Hardly had it vanished when Vail was out in the lawn-space, a pathetically small, lone figure in the immensity of the night. I watched him drag his shuffling feet forward and saw that from another side the gray cat had darted. Their courses converged but Vail's gaze, hypnotically fixed upon the open window, took no heed of the animal until it was directly in his path. Then he spoke as one might speak to a being having full comprehen-

sion: "Back from hell. But they shan't stop me."

Encouraged, the gray cat rubbed against him. With a sudden cry of terror, he kicked it. It screamed and with incredible agility gained the stone coping, along which it swiftly loped. Short of the sill it hesitated for a moment while the man in the moonlight stood rigid, wholly intent upon it. Its lithe body straightened, shot through the air, and crouched on the edge of the window. It craned its neck stealthily and gazed into the room.

Every hair on the animal's body bristled. Even from my distance I could see the shudder which convulsed it. Its head rolled from side to side, its sinewy legs went limp. A spasmodic contraction of every muscle whirled it backward, and I heard the thud of its impact upon the corpses below.

Creeping, crawling, dragging himself as an animal with its spine fractured might have sought its lair with sure death instinct, Vail toiled back across the yard. By what superhuman efforts he gained the terrace, no one can guess. There his cough seized and racked him until it seemed but the mere husk of a human being that leaped with the paroxysm and lay limp on the leaves when it was over.

Again he moved forward. And then the fear of being left alone, face to face with Slocum House, gave me back my voice. That the man might kill me was a consideration of no moment.

"Vail!" I said.

His panting breath stopped.

"It is a living man speaking," I said.

At that he burst into a strangled sobbing. Desperate though he was, he came to me on his knees and caught my hand, clinging to it, pouring out his fear and inner torment in incoherent babblings the whole night through.

Long weeks later we lay, separated by a wall, in the Dormerskill Hospital. The fever had left me, and Dr. Vernam had promised complete recovery from my injuries. But I chafed incessantly under the weight of silence which he had imposed upon me. Words, it seemed to me, would free my brain of some part of that horror. And so, at last, I overbore his doubts and told him the story.

"Most of that I have heard in your delirium," he said, "though not so consecutively presented. The professional instinct for marshaling events in dramatic sequence—"

"Keep that for the lecture-room, Vernam," I said. "Just tell me this: Is Slocum House haunted?"

"Oh, yes," he replied quietly. "That is, it *was* haunted."

"Was? . . . And is no longer?"

"And is no longer," he said.

I gazed, wondering, at my friend, for Vernam is a materialist of the materialists.

"Then you believe in the Seven Curses—" I began, but he cut me short.

"Don't go wild-ghost chasing," he said. "Modern science has an answer for everything on Earth—or under it. The specter that haunted Slocum House was tuberculosis. That unhappy girl—you know her story—left a very real and terrible curse upon the place and the family that killed her. She poisoned, in dying, the air that her persecutors were to breathe after her, so that they drew in her breath with every inspiration. As she died, so died the five sons; six deaths in all, in remorseless logical succession . . . You are shivering."

"The six figures in white. All in a row—" I muttered.

"Have patience," said Dr. Vernam, smiling. "I'm coming to that. Your six spectral figures belong to the Dark Ages—to a closed chapter of exorcisms. To us physicians these haunted houses are shamefully familiar. I've found them in the reeking tenement districts of New York. I've found them in the remote Kentucky mountains. And I've found them on the wind-swept Indiana prairie.

"Always the invisible, intangible specter metes out death to the invaders of his kingdom. Sometimes I've wondered whether all folklore about haunted houses is not merely allegorical symbolism for the spirit of the Great White Plague."

He fell into a brown study from which I recalled him with a forcible protest.

"Your nerves are still deplorably jumpy," he observed. "But I guess that's natural enough under the circumstances. Yes—I was about to continue. Old Silas Slocum"—my friend's lips tightened and hardened — "was warned, and more than once. I warned him myself, after his second wife's death, and again after the second and third deaths in the haunted house.

"He only cursed me for a purveyor of new-fangled notions. It was not until I became health officer for the county that I got my opportunity to lay that ghost. After the death of his fifth son—T. B. again, of course—I found that he was planning to rent the house for the summer and I determined that no other family should move into that death-trap until it was freed of its curse."

Here he launched into a disquisition upon methods of disinfection, scientifically sound, no doubt, but torturing to my impatience.

"For Heaven's sake, Vernam," I begged, "tell me what there was in that room, the mere sight

of which blasted the life from three men, one after another."

"I am trying to tell you. Sight had nothing to do with the matter. The victims saw nothing—at least, nothing that was in itself terror-inspiring. To resume: by virtue of the authority vested in me as county health officer—"

I groaned. "Are you going to quote the law to me?" I cried.

"I can disinfect premises in which there has been a tuberculous patient," he said evenly. "I disinfected Slocum House, on the evening before your accident, as never pest-hole was disinfected before—by a method of my own devising which I had been eager to test. The formula would not interest you. In every room of the house I set a jar of my preparation, and in the large chamber on the ground floor, impregnated with the death of consumptive after consumptive, I set all my remaining canisters—six in all, each sending its germicidal effluvium into the air until not a bacillus could remain alive within the scope of its powers.

"A particularly potent form of cyanide is the basis of the formula. Released by action of the water which I poured into the jars just before leaving the place, it filled the atmosphere with fumes so deadly that one breath would suffice to kill the strongest man."

A light broke in upon me. "That is what you meant by assuring old Silas that his house was guarded as no police could guard it?"

"That is what I meant. And that is why George found the window over the sunken walk unlocked. Every window in the house was unlocked."

"So that the air could be cleared without any one's entering the house."

"Exactly. There are the ghosts of your horrified imagination, effectually dispelled."

"And Vail!" I said. "Has science explained it to his satisfaction?"

"Science can do nothing for Vail. He is dying, logically enough, of tuberculosis, hastened by shock and terror. And, by the way, he has been asking for you. If he is conscious, you may talk to him now."

Vail was quite conscious, though life was obviously at the last flicker. "I'm going pretty soon," was his greeting to me. "I won't be sorry to go. A man doesn't see what I saw that night and preserve much of a taste for living."

"But I saw it, and if you will let me explain—"

"That's different," he interrupted. "There is one thing I didn't tell you that night when I babbled." Something of the vital bitterness of the man still glowed in his eyes.

"And you want to tell me now?"

He nodded, lifting an emaciated hand. "Yes. And my almost going to pieces over it? Do you know why?"

"No."

"I'm the seventh. I'm Martin Slocum. Tell the old man," he added in one final access of hatred, and turning away he slept.

Above Martin Slocum's grave I asked my friend Vernam a question: "Does science explain all?"

Vernam made no reply.

If he found the answer, he has never told me.

if *you await with eagerness each new Saint adventure, and each new issue is a landmark in your reading enjoyment you will want to be sure of getting* THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *regularly and on time . . .*

if *you want the greatest possible variety within the entire range of mystery, detective and crime fiction by the most eminent, the most imaginative and capable writers . . .*

if *tables of contents multiple-starred with the names of such greats as Leslie Charteris, Helen Reilly, Fredric Brown, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Mignon G. Eberhart, William E. Barrett, give you an anticipatory thrill . . .*

THEN—just clip the coupon and mail it to us—with your check or money order—and THE SAINT *will turn up in your mail box, every month, on time.*

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Kindly enter my subscription for THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE.

☐ 6 issues at $2.00 ☐ 12 issues at $3.75

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

Please print SD 54

three sovereigns for a corpse

by . . . E. R. Punshon

The Inspector was annoyed when Bobby Owens implied that he was a born fool. But Bobby knew that three small coins could cry murder.

THE INSPECTOR was speaking to Bobby Owen, Commander, C.I.D., whom he had asked to accompany him. "That's the house," he said, and pointed to a row of small terrace houses. The door of one stood open. A few people were loitering near the gate and some children were playing close by. A woman was telling them to go away. The appearance of the two men caused a sudden flutter of interest. The children stared. "No motive," said the inspector in the tone of a man with a personal grievance.

"Sometimes there is no motive," Bobby Owen said. "Or else it's never known."

He did not know much about the case. He had only just returned from a month's leave and instantly a much worried inspector had come to ask his help. They went into the house of the open door. On their right was the front sitting-room. There, too, the door stood open, and the room was full of people. None of them spoke, but they all watched. The inspector led the

Sergeant Bobby Owen has been for many years so popular a sleuth in the British Isles that it is easy to picture him tramping the English Downs with Elder Statesmen, and even gaining a toehold in the historic portal at Downing Street. But E. R. Punshon's stories have been popular with American statesmen too, as Alexander Woollcott knew when he made up his famed "White House List" of perennial Presidential favorites. Included in that list was a Punshon novel, as excitingly told as this briefer Punshon "must."

way up the stairs. Bobby followed. Their steps sounded loud and heavy in that silent house.

There were three bedrooms. A girl came out of the front bedroom and looked at them and then went back. Bobby had had a glimpse through the room's open door of a bed in which lay an old, old woman, very still. He thought she was asleep. The inspector opened the door of the back bedroom. An open coffin was there on trestles. A dead man lay in it. The room was sparely but comfortably furnished. A single bed, a chest of drawers, a washstand a wicker armchair, another chair. The room looked clean and well cared for.

There were two occupants of the room. At the head of the coffin stood an old man. He was tall and he held himself so erect that he seemed taller. His long white beard hung down over his chest. He had strong, clear-cut features and a great beak of a nose between two eyes of a cold, severe blue, bright and clear still as they had been in youth. Bobby thought him the very picture of what one could imagine an old Hebrew prophet to have been, though certainly a prophet of the "hew them in pieces before the Lord" type.

He looked up as Bobby and the inspector entered. Then he seemed to dismiss them from his thoughts, and returned his steady gaze to the dead man's face. Impossible to tell what was passing in his mind. He gave somehow an impression of being entirely withdrawn from his surroundings into some secret communing with the lifeless man in the coffin.

The other occupant of the room, standing by the window, was a young handsome man, tall and athletic, physically as striking in his way as the old man was in his. But his face was dark and flushed, his eyes troubled, his mouth set in angry lines.

No one spoke. Bobby let his slow glance wander round the room in that quietly intent gaze that he had trained himself to bestow on what he saw so that no detail should escape his attention—or his memory. Not that there was anything here that he could imagine held much significance. He did notice three sovereigns on the mantelpiece. Gold coins are enough to attract attention anywhere. At the moment they were shining in a stray ray of sunshine that had just entered the room and now was gone again.

The inspector broke the silence. In a brisk official voice, he said: "Quick work. Coroner's certificate only just issued, funeral today."

"The verdict was murder against persons unknown, wasn't it?" Bobby asked.

"That's right," said the inspector.

"The sooner the funeral's over,

the better," the young man by the window said.

The inspector said in that brisk official voice of his: "This is Mr. Owen. I told you I was going to bring him round." To Bobby, he said, indicating the old man: "Mr. Jerome, Samuel Jerome. Householder. Deceased: George Martin, grocer's assistant. Found dead, a hundred yards north of this house, stabbed through the heart. He's been a lodger here nine years."

"Ten years," the old man said. "Ten years he had lived with us. I lost both my sons in the first war and George was like a son to me to take their place."

He spoke in a clear resonant voice and then relapsed again into that remoteness in which he seemed able to wrap himself at will. A girl came into the room. It was the same girl Bobby had seen before. The resemblance to the old man was marked. The same strong clearcut features, the same prominent nose, the same look of proud resolve.

"Why do you keep on troubling us?" she said. "I've told you who did it." She lifted a slow hand towards the young man by the window. She said simply: "Frank."

"No evidence," the inspector said. "Not a shred. Good character. No motive."

Frank's dark flushed face became very pale, but Bobby thought it was more with anger than with fear. There was a thin, pinched look at the corners of his mouth.

He said in a carefully controlled voice: "You must be mad, Jenny. Why do you keep on saying that?"

She made no reply, but her clear and steady eyes did not waver.

Bobby said: "No one should say a thing like that without giving reasons. What are your reasons?"

"It's only that I know," she answered. "That's all. I know and so I'm telling you."

"It's a lie," Frank said. "God knows why she is telling it. I think she is mad."

But she did not look in the least mad; her voice, her eyes were steady, her whole manner calm, composed, assured.

"They're engaged," the inspector said. "They are going to be married soon. All fixed up."

"Not now," Frank said. To Jenny he said: "You had better give me back my ring."

"No," Jenny said.

"Do you want to marry a murderer?" he asked.

"I've got to," she answered. "It's necessary."

"What's that mean?" he asked again.

"A wife can't give evidence against her husband," she said.

At that he shrank away, like a man struck suddenly a deadly blow. Then he made a movement

towards her. The inspector moved, too. He thought Frank was going to strike the girl. Perhaps she thought so, too, for she lifted her face slightly, letting her arms fall to her side. Bobby's thought was different. He made a gesture to the inspector to stand away. But he held himself ready to intervene at any moment. Frank drew back. The girl's head dropped and her hands tore at each other.

"All right, all right," Frank said and went back to stand by the window. "What makes you hate me so?" he asked.

"Go back to your grandmother, Jenny," the old man said suddenly. "The doctor said she was never to be left alone."

"One moment, Miss Jenny," Bobby said. "Police experience shows that people ready to accuse others without reasons given are very likely to be guilty themselves."

She had turned towards the door in obedience to her grandfather. She turned back. She stared at Bobby as if trying to understand what he had said. Then she said: "It might be that. It might be that. I suppose a husband can't give evidence against his wife?"

Another stray ray of sunshine came into the room and the three gold coins on the mantelpiece threw back the ray. Jenny went to them and picked them up. With them in her hand she crossed to the coffin. Slowly she placed the three coins by the dead man's side. The others watched her.

She said: "They were his. He earned them. Let him have them still. They are worth more today —a penny more. Thirty-nine and ten today. I saw a notice in a jeweller's window. Perhaps they'll go on getting worth more and more for ever as they lie there by his side."

She went out of the room, then, and the inspector said when she had gone:

"Hysterical! That's what it is. Hysteria."

But Bobby knew that the girl was neither hysterical nor mad—and he wondered.

The old man said: "A penny more. That comes to—" He seemed to calculate, then announced a figure. It was £ 1,467 17*s* 2*d*. "You wouldn't be a pauper then," he went on quickly, "would you? No need to ask for public assistance then."

"She can't believe it was me," Frank said and he spoke very bitterly. "Or else she's mad or else I am. I didn't like him. Jenny didn't. No one did—except those he used to treat in the pubs. 'Generous George,' they called him. And the two old people. He got round them all right. They coddled him like he was their own son. Nothing he could do wrong. What makes her say I killed

him? Are you going to arrest me?"

"For goodness' sake, shut up," Bobby said irritably. "Can't you see I'm trying to work it out? Anyone but a born fool could see what she's up to."

The inspector was offended. He had no idea what the girl was up to and he felt that Bobby, even though unintentionally, had called him a born fool.

His voice full of studied irony, he said: "I think Mr. Owen means that what has just been said has shown him who is guilty."

"Oh, yes," Bobby said, still apparently doing sums in his notebook and so absorbed by them that he never noticed the bitter sarcasm that had been intended. "Yes, it seems all fairly clear now. I must get some of the details into place, though. I understand that the dead man, George Martin, grocer's assistant, lodged here, Mr. Jerome being the householder, had done so for several years, and was looked on as one of the family?"

"He came to us as if he had been sent instead of our sons we lost in the war," Mr. Jerome said, and he stooped a little and his eyes never left the face of the dead man in his coffin. "George was a son to Granny and to me," he repeated.

"Were he and Miss Jenny friendly?" Bobby asked.

"I told you before Jenny didn't like him," Frank said, and Mr. Jerome let this statement pass uncontradicted.

"Our information is to the same effect," said the inspector.

"She thought he toadied to the old people," Frank said.

When he heard this Mr. Jerome looked up for almost the first time.

"He brought Granny flowers every week," he said. "Expensive flowers. He said he got them cheap from a friend in the trade. Fruit, as well. He was very generous." He paused and again it was on the face of the dead man that his eyes were fixed. It was as though he spoke to him and knew that the dead man heard. "You were always generous, George," he said.

"Our information is that he claimed to be lucky at the dogs," said the inspector.

"I've been trying," Bobby said, "to rule out other possibilities. There was the possibility of a quarrel over Miss Jenny. That seems ruled out."

"Absolutely," said the inspector. "That's our information."

"There might have been some other cause of quarrel between the two men. Nothing to suggest it?"

"Absolutely nothing," said the inspector. "Our information—"

"I didn't like him," interrupted Frank, "and he didn't like me. That's all."

"Miss Jenny accuses Mr.

Frank," Bobby continued. "I had to consider whether she herself might be the murderer and that was why she accused another person."

"Jenny couldn't kill a fly if she tried," Frank said. "That's the way she is."

"Yet she seems to wish to see you hanged," Bobby said thoughtfully. "Very interesting."

"Interesting!" cried Frank. "God in heaven! Interesting . . . all right, all right. If that's what she wants. . . ."

Bobby turned to the old man.

"Mr. Jerome," he said, "am I right in thinking that the amount George Martin stole from you was seven hundred and thirty-seven pounds in gold, that it represented your life's savings, that when you found out, you killed him?"

"Yes," said Mr. Jerome.

"I shall have to ask you to come with us to be formally charged," Bobby said.

"Yes," said Mr. Jerome.

The door opened and Jenny came hurrying in.

"Granny's worse," she said. "I've sent for the doctor. Come at once or it'll be too late."

"Yes," said Mr. Jerome. "Mr. Owen has found out."

"Granny's dying," Jenny said. "She has been ever since she knew." To Bobby she said: "If Grandpa killed George, George killed Granny. I promised her I would save Grandpa if I could. I thought I could for a time by saying it was Frank, and I didn't think Grandpa would live long, not after this." To Frank, she said: "I don't suppose you'll ever forgive me. No one could." She took off the engagement ring she was wearing and laid it down. "Come, Grandpa," she said.

They left the room together, neither Bobby nor the inspector tried to stop them. As they went, upon the old man the whole weight of his years seemed suddenly to have fallen.

"That's the sort of divine fool women sometimes are," grumbled Bobby. "Ready to sacrifice her own happiness to save her grandparents." He turned to Frank and said: "Perhaps she hoped you could love her enough—but that's your affair."

Frank picked up the engagement ring.

"I'll buy another twice as good, if I go bust on it," he said. "But how could you tell?"

"Plain Miss Jenny was lying as hard as she knew how," Bobby answered. "Why? To shelter someone else? Who? Her grandfather? Then she picked up those three sovereigns and put them in the coffin because she said he had earned them. What did that mean? When she said they had gone up a penny in value, Mr. Jerome said that made the total value—" He mentioned again the sum £ 1,467 17*s* 2*d*—and went on: "If you had that much you

would never have to ask for public assistance. That amount is the value of seven hundred and thirty-seven sovereigns at today's rate. When I heard about George's generosity, that clinched it. The flowers and the fruit and all the attention to the old lady were just soothing syrup for his conscience. Must have been going on for years, little by little, and when the old man found out it was too much for him."

"It sounds simple the way you put it," Frank said. "What will happen?"

There was concern in his eyes.

"I don't think Mr. Jerome will ever come to trial," Bobby said, "if that's what you mean. I don't think he will live long now his wife is dying and it's all known."

Scotland Yard does its best to hang the wrong man for a crime of intrigue that's thwarted by the inimitable Peter Ruff

THE INDISCRETION OF LETTY SHAW

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Inspector McKee makes one of his rare short story appearances in an ingenious murder amidst an atmosphere of ***suspense***

THE PHONOGRAPH MURDER

By HELEN REILLY

in the next SAINT

---

the secret place of murder

by . . . Harold Montanye

Slade knew that the dark recesses of a killer's mind could conceal the deadliest of secrets. So he built up a deadly line of evidence.

"HAVE ONE for the road, Mr. Slade?" Ted Dickson, the genial proprietor of the Surfside Restaurant, asked from the next table where he was dining with a customer.

"Thank you, no ,Ted," Martin Slade answered, leaning on the arms of his chair for a moment before he rose. Anyone making a snap judgment would have been surprised to learn that his six feet of trim, athletic build tipped the scales at two hundred and five pounds. His clothes hid his weight, only no one would have noticed that either, unless they knew good clothes. His straw-colored hair had a touch of grey where it clung close to his temples, and was the sole telltale sign of his forty years.

Slade held his head a little to one side as if constantly listening for something, and his lips always looked as though he were going to break into a smile. That made his eyes crinkle in reflexive responsiveness, but most of the time they stayed as cold as two pieces of grey ice.

Criminologists have long viewed with dismay the quite terrifying mask of innocence which a murderer may wear even when he has completely failed to cover his tracks. But when a murderer—whether man or woman—has worked out a flawless strategy of concealment that pretense may be so dazzling, so guilelessly assumed, that it deceives the eye like a magician's pass. There's a rare quality of excitement and suspense in this game-of-wits' new mystery by one of the most consistently skillful writers in the field.

"Getting a good rest?" Dickson asked, smiling.

"Morning, noon and night," Slade said. "Nothing but the beach, eat, read and sleep. I'm on my way to more of the latter right now."

"Good, good. Watch out those Miami coppers don't rope you in."

"Not this time," said Slade emphatically. "Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Slade."

The paunchy customer with Dickson said, "Is that Martin Slade, the New York criminal lawyer? I heard he was here."

Dickson nodded. "A brilliant lawyer," he said. "He does a lot of his own investigating when the chips are down. In fact, the Miami police often ask him in for consultations. He helped with that Nichols kid who was kidnaped last winter."

"I remember," said the customer.

Jukebox music from the Marine Bar across the street blasted the soft night air as Slade stepped out on the concrete sidewalk. From the beach came the dull boom of waves pounding the sand and overhead the trade winds rustled the fronds of coco palms. He sauntered up Sunset Boulevard toward the row of trim white cottages whose red brick terraces fronted directly on the beach. He had enjoyed two uninterrupted nights of deep sleep since he had taken his old cottage at Dolphin Beach three days before, and was looking forward to another. He yawned widely as he mounted the steps of the small front porch and opened the screened door.

As he stepped inside he was instantly aware that someone was waiting there in the dark. The nerves at the nape of his neck began to jump and he stood poised like a pointer who has unexpectedly flushed a brace of pheasants. As he reached for the light switch a faint whiff of heady perfume came to him. At the same instant he heard an almost imperceptible sigh that told him the person who was waiting so quietly wasn't too happy to be there.

The girl was sitting in a low, striped-canvas chair that stood against a wall, and her legs were crossed. He noticed the legs and the small automatic she held in one hand at the same time. The legs, he saw, were very nice and he wondered in that fraction of a split second if she knew how to use the purse gun she was holding.

She wore a white, sun-back dress, white open-toed shoes and no hat. The dress and shoes looked pre-eminently white because of the mahogany tan of her body, especially her stockingless legs. Her eyes were hazel with little spots of gold in them and were set wide apart. Her hair was chestnut with glints of gold

in it too. Slade noticed all of these things in that first glance and he thought that she would have looked more fitting with a teacup balanced in her hand instead of the vicious little automatic she was pointing at his stomach.

She regarded him coolly after the light came on and said, "Good evening, Mr. Slade," with a low, cultured voice. She moved her slim, but nicely-rounded body as she spoke and the sensual quality of the movement jacked up Slade's pulse. Her full, wide mouth accentuated her strong jaw and showed another gleam of white as she accompanied the words with a charming smile. Her straight, delicate nose wrinkled a trifle as she smiled.

"Good evening," Slade said. "Do you mind if I sit down?" There was an amused smile on her lips as she shook her head. "A girl loaded with what you have doesn't need a gun," he went on quickly. "But if you think you're going to need it you'd better slip off the safety catch."

She stole a quick look at the gun and said, "I told Guy I didn't think I'd need it. But he said you might try to hold me for concealing a fugitive."

"Who's Guy?" Slade asked. She shook her head when he offered her a cigarette from a box on the table. He watched her, over his lighter, while she slid her thumb toward the safety catch.

"Guido Collini," she said softly. "That's the name you knew him by. You don't seem nearly as unreasonable as Guy said you'd be."

"You haven't given me a chance," Slade said impatiently. "But right now I'd like to go to bed. If you'd put that gun away I'd be grateful. Then perhaps we could—"

Slade broke off abruptly because the name, Guido Collini, had suddenly tapped a memory chord and set it to vibrating. "Guido Collini—the crooner!" he exclaimed with a startled voice.

The girl nervously re-crossed her legs. "You—you remember him?" she asked.

"Remember him!" Slade exploded, coming half out of his chair. "I wish I could forget him."

The girl waggled the gun at him. "He wants to marry me," she said and the little specks of gold in her eyes danced.

But Slade hardly heard her. He was remembering his first contact with the man called the Venetian Warbler. That was what they had called Guido Collini after the riot. He had been, Slade recalled, a handsome, light-complexioned Italian with a twinkle in his soulful brown eyes, blond hair and a smile that

would have warmed a Scrooge.

Slade remembered now the day a big, dumb Pole with an unpronounceable name, a sloping forehead and hair in his eyes, came up before the Parole Board after serving the minimum of an eight-year sentence. The board, of which Slade was a member, had gone through the regular procedure with him and the chairman had asked the Pole what he had to say for himself.

"Gen'l'mn," he had said, his face twisted like a child's, trying to remember, "the black years of my sins are past and I live only for penitence and atonement." All of the board had stared at him as though he had reached up his sleeve and brought out a jabbering baboon.

"Who taught you that!" the chairman of the board had thundered when he could speak.

The Pole had tried to convince them that the rhetorical pronouncement was his own handiwork, but after a bit he confessed that another prisoner named Collini had fashioned it for him—for a pack of cigarettes.

The board had sent for Collini to warn him that it would hurt his own chances if he ever coached another prisoner coming up for parole. Slade had looked up Collini's record at that time and found that he was doing a ten-year stretch for participation in a hold-up in which a policeman had been seriously wounded. Collini had been a singer in a night club and had got mixed up with the leader of a gang of hoodlums who frequented the club. It was his first and only recorded crime. And it was through his singing ability that he got his chance to ingratiate himself with the parole board.

It all came flashing back through Slade's mind now as he remembered the evening he had had dinner with the warden, and had gone to the chapel afterward to see the regular prison movie. Slade and the warden had sat on a little balcony above the projection room with two thousand brooding, dangerous men below them. The guards had sat on their high chairs nervously swinging their locust sticks, acutely aware that anything might happen.

Something did happen. A high, shrill scream echoed through the darkness and died as instantly as the man who had uttered it. There were shouts for lights, but no lights came on. And in the darkness the prisoners began to mill like maddened cattle as they searched for the invisible guards.

It had reached the riot stage when Guido Collini's voice arose as clear as a silver bell in that awful, shuffling stillness. He was singing "The Sidewalks of New York." A few moments later the room rocked with a hundred voices taking up the refrain in a

frenzied release of tension. When the lights came on Guido Collini was still singing his heart out, and not far from him was the bent form of a man with a knife in his back. The prisoners lined up meekly, some still singing with Guido's magnificent voice leading them, and order was quickly restored.

Slade, with the warden's cooperation, had managed to bring Collini before the next parole board. He had been released a few days later and Slade, after a long talk with him, had been convinced he would have nothing more to do with hoodlums and crime.

But soon after his release he vanished without ever reporting to his parole officer. The police had searched for him relentlessly, because a policeman had been wounded in the course of his one crime. Even rumors of his death had not caused the authorities to abandon their search for him.

II

"If the police catch up with Collini," Slade said grimly to the girl, "he'll go back to finish his stretch, with two years added for violating parole."

"Do you want to hear why he violated parole?" the girl asked, drawing in her breath and moving sensually again. Slade admitted he did by remaining silent.

"Guy learned, soon after he was released, that the Duval gang intended to silence him permanently. They hadn't liked the testimony he gave in court, and they were afraid he would talk some more. He also learned that they had double-crossed him at the time of the hold-up by using him as a decoy. He was the only one captured."

"That circumstance won't help him, even if it could be proved," Slade said. "Policemen don't like to be shot at. He has a lot of time to serve yet."

"Guy said you were fair," she said softly, wetting her lips with the tip of her tongue. Her eyes were pleading. "He needs your help, and—and I love him, Mr. Slade."

"Sending a gun moll to plead his case isn't going to help him either," Slade said irritably. "How can you expect me to believe what you say when I find you waiting here in the dark with a gun in your hand?"

"Gun moll!" the girl exclaimed and her laughter rippled. "Mr. Slade, I'm Junior League." Slade stared, and suddenly, miraculously, he believed her. She had the manner.

"Shortly after Guy was paroled," she went on, "he came to Florida because the only real friend he had was here. Their friendship dates back to the time they were ten, and in a school choir together. That's where Guy's voice was trained."

Slade couldn't conceal his amazement as he tried to imagine one of Frog Duval's torpedoes starting life as a choir boy. The girl's smile became faintly amused again.

"His friend, an auditor, loaned him money, and coached him and gave him a place to live until he could get him a position with one of the finest sanatoriums in Florida. He now has a clerical position of trust in the administrative end. He's not making a million dollars, but he makes a little extra by singing in choirs and at women's clubs. He Anglicized his name to Guy Collins. He lives at the sanatorium. He—he thought he had found a place where Duval's gang or the police wouldn't find him."

"Why has he jeopardized it by telling you?" Slade asked.

"Because we fell in love," the girl said simply.

Slade cocked his head a little more to one side and looked at her out of the corners of his grey eyes. Again he remembered the ignorant Pole who had recited Collini's composition to the Parole Board. He knew that Collini was after more than a pack of cigarettes this time.

Slade's voice was skeptical as he said, "How did you know I was here and why did you come to me?"

"Guy had read in the papers that you sometimes worked with the Miami police and he learned where you always stay down here. He saw your name among plane arrivals a few days ago. He doesn't feel he is safe any longer."

"Why?"

"Because of a death which the police listed as a suicide, but which Guy and I think might have been murder," the girl said unsteadily. "Guy says he would be in a very bad spot if the police re-opened the case. He hopes you'll help us decide what we ought to do."

"Who," Slade asked, "do you think may have been murdered?"

"My aunt," the girl said and her eyes glistened. "She was the wife of the director and owner of the sanatorium. "I've lived with her and my uncle since my parents died when I was a child."

"What happened to your aunt?"

"She and my uncle always slept in separate rooms," the girl said, and her lips quivered. "She locked both of the doors to her room one night, and turned on the gas logs before she went to bed. A maid smelled gas coming from her room and called my uncle. He broke in a panel of a door, and unlocked it. But she was dead."

"Did she leave any notes?"

"Just a short one to my uncle," the girl said.

"Who benefited from her death?" Slade asked.

"Benefited?" the girl hesitated, studying Slade.

"I mean, did she leave any money or property?"

"She did, yes. She left my uncle and myself six hundred thousand dollars—to be divided between us, equally." Fear crept into her eyes. "That's why Guy and I thought—"

"Did this happen before or after Collini fell in love with you?"

"After. Don't you think anyone could fall in love with me if I didn't have any money?" she asked indignantly.

"And you'll probably get your uncle's share when he dies?" Slade asked.

"Not—not if he marries again," the girl said, "and he probably will because he had a—a mistress in Miami before my aunt died. That's another reason why Guy thought I ought to come to you." Her voice sank to a whisper. "We're afraid my uncle might find it greatly to his advantage if I died first!"

Slade knew what she meant to imply, but he ignored it. He said: "You didn't kill your aunt to get her money, did you?"

The girl's eyes opened wide with horror. "That's a ridiculous question, Mr. Slade," she said. "I loved my aunt dearly. I didn't know anything about her will."

"You haven't answered my question," he said.

"No. I did not kill her," she said firmly, her eyes indignant.

"Good," Slade said. "Do you suppose Collini could have learned about her will and killed her so that you'd inherit the money? It would not be very difficult for him to get it from you after you married him?"

He regarded her steadily.

"That's ridiculous too!" she said, her eyes flickering from Slade's face to a spot just above his right shoulder and then back again. As she tightened her grasp on the little automatic Slade turned his head.

He saw a man's waist with a pair of doubled fists hanging just below it in the doorway of a closet behind him. As his gaze flashed upward he recognized Guido Collini. The Italian's eyes were bitterly angry.

As he turned his head again, Slade went forward on his toes. He gripped the girl's wrist on the inside to deflect the nose of the automatic away from himself, and gave a vicious twist. He snatched the gun as it left her fingers, and then ducked, just as Collini's feet clattered on the floorboards behind him. He jabbed the gun into Collini's belly, and Collini came up on his toes. The girl stifled a scream.

"Pretty quick on your feet for an old guy, aren't you, Slade?" Collini muttered. His voice was furious and dangerous.

"You'll be a lot older than I am when you get out of jail again, Guido," Slade told him.

III

Slade moved around the overstuffed chair in which he had been sitting, and waved Collini into it with the automatic. He looked at the girl and said, "I hope you have a permit for this thing."

She didn't answer as she rubbed angrily at her wrist.

The three sat facing each other, and Collini said to the girl, "I told you he was tough and you'd have to watch him."

His strong, white teeth flashed in a captivating smile and the girl's face softened as she smiled back at him. They seemed united by a deep understanding and yet Collini, Slade noticed, appeared not entirely at his ease under her gaze.

It didn't seem to be the automatic or Slade that bothered Collini, but the girl. For a moment as he studied her it came to him that a man of volatile temperament would always be restless in her presence. The answering spark in her flamed too unpredictably. He forced his mind away from the irrelevancy and addressed Collini.

"Why the hide and seek, Collini?" he snapped.

"The name is Collins, Mr. Slade—Guy Collins. It sounds better than Collini on me."

"The police still want you under either name," Slade said grimly. "And speaking of names, what's yours, Miss—" He waited for one of them to supply it, and as they hesitated he snapped, "With the help of the police I can learn it in a half hour—if she has been telling me the truth."

"Every word of it was the truth, Slade," Collini said. He took a cigarette from a package protruding from the breast pocket of his jacket, and lit it with a match from a packet of gold book-matches, with the initials GC stamped on each side in blue.

"When she told you she was top-drawer she was telling you the truth," he added, staring levelly at Slade.

"Then let's stop being mysterious," Slade said. He asked the girl's name again.

"Margot Phillips," she told him. "My uncle is owner and director of the Coquina Sanatorium in Coquina Grove."

"Your uncle is J. Gerald Chadwick," Slade supplied. "I remember reading about your aunt when I was here last winter. That's where you've holed-up, eh, Collini?"

"Didn't I tell you he was smart?" Collini asked blandly. "He speaks four languages too." He said it with a straight face, but the girl laughed.

Slade, studying him, wondered at Collini's assurance and cockiness. Surely the man was in no position to be cocky.

"I kept the same initials," Collini went on, his eyes twinkling as he held up the packet of gold book-matches. "Guido Collini—Guy Collins. I didn't want to get confused. I'm not as bright as you are."

"You're bright enough to know that Frogs Duval is in Alcatraz and his gang of hoodlums have been jailed or scattered," Slade said. "So you've cooked up a story that will let you come out into the open with Miss Phillips running interference for you. Do you think the law will overlook your jumping parole if you feed them that cock-and-bull story Miss Phillips told me?"

"All I can do is hope," Collini said as he returned Slade's gaze. He was serious now. He leaned toward Slade with his long-fingered, expressive hands open, palms upward, and said, "We went over all this before you got me sprung. I knew Duval was in Alcatraz but he could have me blasted from there. I would have been a sitting duck if I had reported to my parole officer each week. If I can turn up a murderer for the police and you were to testify in my behalf the situation would be quite different."

"That's eye-wash and you know it!" Slade said angrily. He turned to the girl and asked, "Do you have any concrete evidence to prove that your uncle killed your aunt? Or is it that you have an intense, personal dislike for your uncle? Do you think that if you can get him electrocuted you'll get his share of what your aunt left too?"

"Take it easy Slade," Collini said. "We believe that if Chadwick did kill his wife he wouldn't hesitate to kill Margot, too. You see, the money was left in such a way that if either Mr. Chadwick or Margot should die within four years the survivor would get the whole estate. They each get half of the income now, but after four years they will get the principal."

"The police won't take your guesses to a prosecutor," Slade said impatiently. "You must be able to prove it."

"Will you come over to the sanatorium tomorrow?" Collini asked earnestly. "We'll show you how we think he did it. We believe you can prove it, Slade. And in the meantime, toss this around. I managed to get hold of the suicide note Mrs. Chadwick left. It was locked in Chadwick's files, and although Margot identified the handwriting as her aunt's at the time of the inquest, now she doesn't think her aunt wrote it."

"You'd have to get the opinion of reputable graphologists on that," Slade said. "The police would—"

"I have," Collini said. "I checked around, and then mailed it to a graphologist and private eye over on the Beach. I sent a

specimen of Mrs. Chadwick's handwriting along with it."

"You didn't tell me you had sent it to a graphologist, Guy!" Margot cried, her eyes widening in startlement.

Collini smiled and leaned forward to touch her hand. "I had to get an expert's opinion because if your aunt *didn't* write the note you're going to need protection. But I didn't want to frighten you if it wasn't necessary."

"You should have told me," Margot said, still looking startled. "After all, I'm the one in danger."

"Who did you send the note to Collini?" Slade asked.

"Carl Harder," Collini said. "Do you know him?"

Slade nodded, remembering the thin, shifty-eyed, elderly man who had been called in by the Miami police as a graphologist on the Nichols kidnapping case. He had once had occasion to call on Harder at his office, which he maintained in a little house in the south section of Miami Beach. The police had great respect for Harder's work but he, Slade, had not trusted him.

"You say you mailed it to him," Slade said. "Why?"

"I was afraid he might have a retentive memory for faces," Collini explained. "You'll remember it wasn't long ago they had pictures of me, with a number, spread all over the country. I took a box in the Miami post office and had him send his reply there. He wrote me saying Mrs. Chadwick did *not* write the note. But he didn't send the note back. He asked me to telephone him instead. I did, and made a date to see him tonight. I had sent him a small check and he hinted I could pay the rest of his fee when I see him later on tonight. He lives and has his office at Six-nineteen Echo Terrace. Do you know where it is, Slade?"

"Yes, I've been there," Slade said. He rose and moved over to a table beside the front door where a telephone rested in its cradle. "What," he asked Collini as he picked up the receiver, "makes you think I'd let you go anywhere without a police escort?"

Collini's eyes narrowed, and then his face lit up with a winning smile. "You'll give me my chance, Slade," he said. "We'd get no place if they threw me back in the pokey. You know where I can be picked up any time. I'll be there—word of honor!"

"Word of honor!" Slade flared. "You broke it once, Collini." But he wasn't really castigating Collini. He was furious at himself because he knew he was going to put the telephone back in its cradle and not use it. He knew he was going to gamble on Collini making a sucker of him

again because of the momentary flashes of terror and fright he had seen in the girl's eyes. He dropped the telephone and said, "If you cross me this time, Guido, I'll find you and you'll get the book."

The girl rose and moved across the room toward Slade with unconscious grace. She stood on tiptoe and put her face against Slade's while she murmured her thanks. Her voice was a caress and her cheek was cool and soft as the heady scent of her perfume crept up to him. Slade's pulse began to hammer. He glanced at Collini and saw a flicker of sly amusement on his face. As she drew away Slade handed her the little automatic. She thanked him with her smile and eyes and put it in her purse.

A moment later Collini lifted her off her feet as he kissed her. She clung to him until Slade turned away to hide his embarrassment and started to give Collini directions.

"Go down Biscayne Boulevard when you get into Miami," he said. "Go over the MacArthur Causeway and when you get on the Beach keep on Fifth Street until you come to Collins Avenue. Go right on Collins until you come to Echo Terrace—about three or four blocks. Turn left and it's in the middle of the first block—a dirty little brown house. And watch Harder," he cautioned. "He may have a little blackmail in mind. Don't tell him who's involved."

"Thanks," Collini said. "Before I go over there I'm going to drop in on the lad who got me my job at Coquina. I want him to know what's going on. He was harboring a fugitive when he took me in and I want to keep him in the clear."

"How long will you be with him?" Margot asked. "You'll want to talk to him alone."

"Not long—maybe an hour," Collini said.

The girl looked at the diamond-encrusted watch on her wrist. "It's only nine now," she said. "You can drop me off at The Everglades and I'll go in to see Sarah Tremper. I'll be waiting on the front veranda with Sarah between ten-twenty and ten-forty?"

"Right," Collini said.

"I'll drive down to Coquina Grove early tomorrow afternoon to see what you have to show me and hear what Harder had to say," Slade said.

"You have a car, Mr. Slade?" Margot asked. "I could come for you."

"A rental car," Slade said. "I'll make it." He turned to Collini. "How," he asked, "do I find you?"

"Ask the guard on the gate," Collini said. "He'll tell you."

The moon was swimming in a golden radiance and a brisk breeze from the Atlantic was

still rattling the palm fronds along the beach as Slade stood in the doorway of his cottage and watched them cross Sunset Boulevard to Margot's car. The brisk breeze wrapped the girl's white linen dress close around her hips and swirled it above her knees.

She looked back over her shoulder as she started to push her dress down, but when she saw Slade watching she waved a hand and let the dress blow. She waved again as they drove away. Slade stood in silent thought until the red glow of their taillights disappeared.

He closed the screen door and took the Miami Beach telephone book from the shelf below the instrument. In a few moments an irascible voice said in his ear, "Carl Harder speaking."

"Martin Slade of New York speaking here," Slade said. "You remember me?"

"Certainly," Harder snapped.

"I'd like to have a talk with you, "Slade said.

"Tonight?"

"If possible," Slade said.

"Can't see you before—" there was a pause. "Is ten-thirty all right?" Harder asked.

"I'll be there," Slade said, and hung up.

While he mixed himself a drink, and while he sipped it on the red brick terrace overlooking the beach he pondered on why a girl of Margot Phillips' social status and desirability would be attracted by a man who was an ex-convict and probably would go to prison again. And he pondered over the garbled things they had told him while he tried to read significance into their facial expressions and their reactions to each other while they told it.

He had been able to fasten on nothing stable when he started to cruise south on AIA three-quarters of an hour later. The traffic increased constantly after AIA became Collins Avenue. Each side was lined with gaudy motels, taprooms, swimming pools, neon lights, blaring juke boxes and tropical plantings that were glaringly off-color under the strong artificial lights. Long, sleek passenger carriers roared overhead, their running lights blinking in the overhead shadows of the lights from Miami and Miami Beach.

When he had traversed the length of the island and came to the intersection where Fifth Street fed into Collins Avenue he reduced his speed to a crawl. Here there were fish and chip stands, sidewalk venders, hawkers and swarms of the kind of people who were not paying the upkeep of the fabulous Miami Beach hotels. Several blocks south he turned left on Echo Terrace and drove slowly past the dirty little brown house

where Carl Harder had his office.

He kept on down the block, turned left at the next corner, left again and came back into Collins Avenue. Just before the intersection of Fifth Street and Collins he found a parking space and left his car.

He made his way back to Echo Terrace slowly. It was just a minute before ten-thirty when he mounted the steps of the scrubby brown dwelling. There were no lights in the house except in the hallway, or if there were they could not be seen behind the green shades that were pulled down to sill level inside the dirty windows. He yanked the porcelain handle of a bell and could hear the dismal jangle somewhere inside the house. He tried to peer through the frowsy lace curtains on the inside of the front door and could see only that the hallway was lit by a dim electric bulb. He rang again, and again heard the dismal jangle.

After waiting a few moments longer he tried the knob of the door. The hinges softly squeaked in protest as it opened. The hallway was carpeted with worn linoleum and contained only a battered hall table with a cracked mirror above it. On a hook beside the mirror hung a badly soiled panama hat.

It was dark down the hallway and dark up the stairs to the left but under a door at the end of the hallway he could see a dim shaft of light. The place was so eerie and dismal Slade would not have been surprised had black witches spat at him from the shadows. He made his way toward the shaft of light and tapped on the door. Again there was no answer. He turned the knob and slowly opened the door.

There were a couple of dirty rag rugs on the floor of the little room and the shade of the one window was pulled. The room was musty and smelled of stale cigar smoke. A bright bulb with a green shade dangled against a festoon of cobwebs that swayed gently behind the light.

Against the window, and under the light, there was an oblong table covered with papers, half-filled bottles of chemicals, pencils, erasers, a microscope, magnifying glasses, an electric plate with a battered coffee pot on top, and little heaps of ancient dirt.

But Slade's eyes were fastened on the silent, still form of a man who was slouched over the table. One side of his face was flattened on it and his hands grasped the edge on each side of his head like claws. From Slade's position he could see one glassy eye that was open.

"Harder!" Slade said softly and the word bounced back at him. He crossed the room and touched the man's hand and found that it was warm. After he was sure he had no pulse he

found the two holes in his back that were still oozing blood.

Slade went across the room and closed the door into the hallway. He wrapped his handkerchief around his hand and went through the papers on the table and found nothing of interest. He pulled open the almost empty filing cabinets and went through them hastily. He deftly slid his hand into the inside pocket of Harder's jacket and pulled out a battered wallet and a half dozen old letters covered with notes. He went over the room quickly and could find no trace of the letter from Collini or the suicide note.

He was moving swiftly and as quietly as he could as he wiped the inside and outside knobs of the door with his handkerchief. A piece of brightly colored paper on the floor, away from the door, attracted his attention and he bent to pick it up with the tips of his fingers. It was the back of a packet of gold book-matches and the initials GC were stamped on it with blue letters.

He gingerly put it inside his wallet being careful not to smear any finger prints on it. He looked at his watch and saw that it was ten forty-five. He closed the door into the hallway behind him and went quietly down the hall. He wiped the outside knob while he pretended to be having difficulty closing the door.

After he strolled down the steps, he went east on Echo Terrace, away from the lights of Collins Avenue, following the same course he had driven his rental car to park it. Before he got to the parking lot he went in an all night restaurant where a juke box was blaring. He shut himself in a telephone booth, got Miami Beach Police Headquarters on the phone and asked for Homicide.

"There's a murder at Six-nineteen Echo Terrace," he said when a sleepy voice came on the line.

The sleepy voice woke up and shouted, "Who is this?"

"Six-nineteen Echo Terrace," Slade repeated and hung up.

He could hear the siren of a police car shrieking as he drove his car out of the parking lot.

IV

The easterly breeze that had been fanning the beach for the past two days had shifted gradually until now it was a cold north-west wind as Martin Slade went down the steps of his cottage at noon the next day. White-capped waves were piling high on the beach and grey clouds scudded angrily across the sky.

On the horizon the Gulf Stream was beginning to kick up an irregular pattern. Only a few rugged shell collectors, and a couple of lone fishermen who were casting into the heavy surf,

were left on the beach as rain began to splatter on the sand. Slade hurried behind the wheel of his rented car as the wind began to drive the cold rain before it.

The morning papers Slade had sent for had carried an exhaustive account of the murder of Carl Harder. The Miami Beach police intimated that Harder had been slain by an underworld character to even an old score; that they, the police, had put out a dragnet that would find him, and an arrest could be expected at any time. Slade had scanned the accounts quickly and thrown the papers in a waste basket.

Rain was coming down in a solid wall of water as he started south on AIA toward Miami Beach. Below Surfside he cut across the North Bay Causeway and in Miami sneaked into the traffic on Biscayne Boulevard. After he had crossed the Miami River he angled toward Coquina Grove. Once there he had no trouble locating the Coquina Sanatorium.

He drove slowly by it but could see little because of the high brick wall covered with deep red bougainvillaea. There was a heavy iron gate guarded by a uniformed attendant in the approximate center of the brick wall, and beyond a winding driveway bordered with red and yellow hybiscus. The driveway curved through a lush green lawn that was dotted with flaming tropical shrubs, towering oaks and royal palms. Through the shrubs and behind a row of royal palms he caught a glimpse of gleaming white pillars in the tradition of southern plantations.

Down the street a couple of blocks there was a gas station on a corner. Across the street in a row was a drug store, a quality market, a cigar and candy store, and a bit farther on, a small but gayly decorated inn called The Cloisters. There were neon lamps burning in the windows of the taproom.

While the gas station attendant filled his tank Slade asked him if he knew where he could find Guy Collins at the Coquina Sanatorium. The attendant smiled and told Slade the guard on the gate would give him instructions. When he had finished at the gas station he parked his car and went into the cigar store and then into the drug store where he bought cigarettes and razor blades, in turn.

He asked the persons who waited on him the same question he had asked at the gas station. Both of the clerks smiled when Slade mentioned Collini's adopted name and gave him the same answers. They all knew and liked Collini and Slade remembered that the inmates had liked him in prison too.

When he went into the taproom of The Cloisters he asked the bartender, a natty young man

with bright eyes and necktie, for a corned beef sandwich and a bottle of beer. While he drank the beer and waited for the sandwich he asked the barkeep if he knew Guy Collins.

"My pal," the barkeep said and his face lit up with another approving smile. "We serve good liquor and Guy likes it." He cocked his head on one side and added, "But not too much. He likes to sing so if it's slow three or four of us make harmony. Quietly, of course. He's a great feller. A nice sense of humor and he *can* sing."

"Yes, I know," Slade said. "The sanatorium is just up the street?"

"You can't miss it," the young man said. "Ask the man on the gate."

After he had finished the sandwich and beer Slade drove back and swung his car across the sidewalk facing the gates of the sanatorium. The attendant opened one gate and came out.

"Guy Collins," Slade said. "How do I find him?"

"Follow the driveway and park by the main building," the man told him. "Go around the main building and you'll find a brass plate on a door in the rear that says 'Administration.' You will find Collins there. The far left corner."

He threw the gates wide and Slade saw him make an entry in a notebook as he drove in. He followed the yellow and red hybiscus bordered driveway through the exotic plantings, great oaks garlanded with Spanish moss and groves of palms. Through the palms he saw the glittering waters of a small lake with caracara, pink and black flamingos and other wading birds.

It had stopped raining and the sun was trying to peek through the clouds when he circled the white-pillared mansion and parked beside a dozen expensive cars in the parking lot. He sauntered around the end of the large mansion and saw a half dozen smaller buildings beyond it, among them a smaller residence that was a replica of the main building. It came to Slade that Collini couldn't have found a better place to hide. It would be the last place Duval's hoodlums or the police would look for him.

Immersed in his thoughts he crossed the thick Bermuda grass toward the brass plate he had located at the rear. He had not intended to be stealthy but his footsteps were noiseless on the thick grass as he approached the open doorway.

Two people were standing there, just inside the door. One was Collini. The other was the girl in his arms. She had her arms around him, too, and her hands were pressing so hard that her fingernails were partially white.

Collini was kissing her with his back to the doorway.

Slade could see the girl's light, almost blonde hair over Collini's shoulder and he could see a pair of tanned, photogenic legs protruding below a checked gingham dress. As he stared the girl lifted one foot up behind her, and then they were like two flaming figures sculptured in bronze.

Slade remembered the earnest tenderness and sincerity of the Phillips girl when she had told him the night before that she loved Collini and that he wanted to marry her. He remembered how Collini had kissed her and sudden anger welled up within him. Unreasoning anger. He had liked the Phillips girl and had admired her honest courage in admitting that she loved an ex-convict. Slade didn't stop to think that what Collini was doing at the moment was strictly his own business. He stepped forward quickly and tapped Collini on the shoulder.

He expected Collini would drop his arms as though he had found he was hugging a pillar of venomous snakes. But he didn't. He lifted his head slowly, still holding the girl tenderly. The girl's eyes opened and then spread wide with confusion as she saw Slade over Collini's shoulder. Crimson flooded her sun-tanned face as Collini turned his head and regarded Slade with deadly eyes.

"Casanova Collini!" Slade said contemptuously.

A little cry escaped the girl as she wrenched away and fled through a doorway behind her. Collini spun around with his right fist swinging as Slade set himself and rolled his head away from the punch. Then a voice from the doorway through which Slade had come cried, "Guy! Mr. Slade!"

They both dropped their hands as Margot Phillips came into the room her face aghast. "What are you doing?" she gasped. "You—"

"I was showing Slade a sneak punch the new physical director taught me," Collini said and his incantating smile spread over his face like a shaft of sunlight.

"You both looked so ferocious," she said, smiling her relief.

"You're supposed to look ferocious even though you're only pretending," Collini said lightly.

She held up two letters she had in her hand and said, "I must post these. Back in a jiffy," and she went through the doorway the girl Collini had been kissing had used.

"You're too quick with your fists and your mouth, Collini," Slade snapped. "Who was that girl?"

"Beth Harmon — Chadwick's secretary," Collini snapped back.

"I hope Chadwick doesn't kiss her the same way," Slade said

and he saw Collini's face twitch.

"He's too busy with his babe in Miami," Collini said and he laughed mirthlessly. As he finished speaking Margot came back, crossed the room and put her cheek against Slade's as she had done when she'd thanked him the night before.

"I knew you'd come," she said with her low, gentle voice. That almost imperceptible sigh came from her lips as she drew back and smiled up at Slade with provocative eyes. "I wish you'd call me Margot," she said.

Slade looking down at her couldn't help noticing that in spite of her clever use of make-up there was a tiny cut on her lip and one of her eyes was slightly discolored and swollen.

"I'd be delighted," he said as he wondered if Collini had done it.

V

"I want to talk to both of you," Slade said crisply. He moved across the room and sat down in a swivel chair behind a desk and motioned toward the two chairs beside it.

"Yes, *sir!*" Collini said and he touched his lips to Margot's forehead before he sat down. She smiled up at him and pressed his arm.

"Where," Slade asked Margot, "is the little automatic you were waving at me last night?"

"I suppose it's in my handbag," she said looking surprised at the question. "Or did I leave it in your cottage last night?" She wrinkled her forehead trying to remember.

"You put it in your handbag when I gave it back to you," Slade said.

"What gives, Slade?" Collini asked tightly.

"Don't you read the papers?" Slade asked.

Margot shook her head. "I haven't seen one today," Collini said. "But I only read the headlines to see if we're at war and then I turn to the sports page."

"The papers said this morning," Slade told them, trying to watch both of their faces at once, "that your graphologist—Harder—was shot to death last night."

"Last night!" Margot whispered. She turned her head slowly to look at Collini as she put the tips of her fingers over her mouth. Collini's expression did not change as he stared at Slade.

"You sang yourself out of jail once, Collini, but I don't think you can do it again," Slade rasped. "You're in a tough spot."

"It's a sweetheart," Collini said softly and he ran his hand back and forth along his jaw. "You want to hear what happened last night?"

"If it's the truth," Slade said. Margot was staring into space with fearful eyes. Collini put his hand on her wrist and she man-

aged to give him a frightened smile.

"It was nine when we left your place," Collini said. Slade nodded. "We went over the North Bay Causeway to Biscayne Boulevard and when we got downtown I dropped Margot off at The Everglades. Then I went over to northwest Fourteenth to see the pal who staked me down here."

"What's his name and telephone number?" Slade asked, taking a notebook from his pocket. "I want his business telephone number, too, and his address."

"Only if you promise not to give it to the coppers," Collini said firmly.

"I could find out without any promise," Slade said, "but I'll tell no one unless it's necessary."

Collini gave Slade the name of Charles Terrill, his address on Northwest Fourteenth Street and his home and business telephone numbers. "I told him just what has happened because I wanted his advice," Collini said. "We talked the thing back and forth for nearly an hour. Then I picked Margot up at The Everglades. What time was it, honey?"

"Ten-thirty," Margot said, her voice just above a whisper. "I looked at my watch just as you came up. I was waiting on the veranda," she told Slade.

"You had been with your friend all the time Guido was gone?" Slade asked.

She quickly shook her head and frowned. "No," she said. "Sarah wasn't in. She didn't know I was coming, of course. I went to a moving picture theatre —the Waverly—on Flagler Street. I stayed there until ten-twenty because Guy said he would be at the Everglades at ten-thirty."

She continued to frown.

"See anyone you knew at the theatre?" Slade asked. "You may need proof of just where you were for that hour."

"Don't be silly," she said, and lifted her head high. "My word will be good."

"You won't be talking to the Junior League!" Slade said harshly. "This is murder." Then he was contrite because of the shocked expression that came to her face. But a moment later she brightened.

"Oh!" she said. "I think the cashier at the movie will remember me because I thought she hadn't given me the right change. I gave her a ten-dollar bill and she only gave me back four ones and a little change. I went back to the window and made quite a fuss about it."

"Did she give you another five?" Slade asked.

"No," Margot said, "but she took my name and address and said after she'd checked her accounts later on, if she had five dollars over, they'd mail me a check."

"Then you went into the movie?"

"Yes."

"Did she see you when you came out at ten-twenty?"

"No. She had gone. I asked the doorman if she was still around. He said she had gone home. We talked for a moment." She laughed and her face flushed. "He—he wanted to take me home."

"He'll remember you," Slade said and Collini smiled.

"All right," Slade said to Guido. "After you picked up Margot you drove over to the Beach. What happened?"

"I followed your directions," Collini said, his alert eyes not leaving Slade's. "When we started to turn into Echo Terrace we found it was crawling with police cars and cops. I got to hell out of there. I was afraid some bright copper might recognize me. We went home."

"You didn't inquire what had happened?"

"I wasn't interested," Collini said. "Some drunk gets a knife in the belly down there every so often."

"Is that right?" Slade asked Margot.

"Yes," she said and she started to say something more and stopped. Slade raised his eyebrows and waited.

"Go ahead," Collini said gently.

"It's nothing much," she said hesitantly. "I just remembered that when I told you Sarah Tremper wasn't in and I'd gone to a movie, you told me you had to wait quite a time for Chuck Terrill."

"Long enough to go over to Echo Terrace and back?" Slade asked Collini.

"Don't be ridiculous," Margot said. "I wouldn't have mentioned it only you said you wanted the truth."

"The truth and nothing but the truth," Collini said and he touched the tip of her nose with the tip of his forefinger and smiled.

"I want you to know I'd do anything for Guy, Mr. Slade. *Anything!*" Margot said passionately.

"Would you lie for him under oath?" Slade asked.

"If I thought it was best," she said fervently.

"Look!" Collini put in suddenly. "What if the cops found the letter I wrote to Harder, along with the suicide note? If they found my prints on them I'm on my way back to jail."

"You'd know it by now if they'd found them," Slade said and he studied Collini with calculating eyes. "I went to see Harder last night at ten-thirty. I thought you might be there. Someone had shot him only a short time before. Whoever shot him has your letter and the note." The blandness left Collini's face

as Margot covered her lips with her fingers again. Collini tried not to look frightened. Margot didn't try.

"I searched the police," Slade went on, still trying to watch both of them at once, "and I found no trace of your letter or the note found beside Mrs. Chadwick's bed."

"You notified the police?" Collini asked and Slade saw the cunning in his eyes.

"Not immediately," Slade said. "I searched the place and then phoned homicide from a phone booth on my way back to my car. I didn't give my name because I didn't want to be hamstrung by the police."

"Isn't that what you'd call skating on thin ice, Slade?" Collini asked innocently.

"You worry about yourself," Slade said sharply. "If the police learn you sent that suicide note to Harder and can put you anywhere near his place last night you'll burn, Collini." Both fright and bewilderment were stamped on Margot's face as she gazed back and forth at them with her lips moving silently.

"All right, Slade," Collini said quietly after a few moments of shock. "I know I have two strikes against me. What do I do?"

"Is there any chance that Mr. Chadwick learned you sent the note to Harder?" Slade asked. "I mean, that you left Harder's reply where Chadwick might have seen it?"

"It's quite possible," Margot said a little breathlessly. "Guy is terribly careless about such things. That's how I—" she broke off and looked at Collini questioningly.

"Go on, honey, tell him," Collini said.

"That's how I found out about Guy's police record," she went on. "Chuck Terrill came in one day while Guy was in Miami. When he didn't find him he wrote Guy a note and left it on his desk. When Guy came back he opened the sealed envelope Chuck had left and after he read the note he carelessly threw it down on his desk and went out of the room. I came in while he was gone and absent-mindedly read Chuck's note. I didn't even realize I was reading it until the contents penetrated and then I was horrified at what I had done."

"What did it say?" Slade asked her.

"It was a warning to Guy not to drink too much. He referred to a singing spree he and Guy had had with the bartender at The Cloisters, an inn up the street. 'If you babble about your police record,' he wrote, 'we may both be in very hot water.' "

"What was your reaction when you read it," Slade asked Margot.

"I told you, I was horrified," she said. "I was falling in love

with Guy then and I knew that no one else must see it. I started to put it away in Guy's desk when he came in and saw me with it."

"We went for a drive, almost down to the Keys," Guido put in. "And I told her all about myself. That was when we found out we loved each other." Collini gave Margot his most enchanting smile and Slade squirmed uncomfortably in his chair as he saw the expression it brought to the girl's eyes.

"Where is Harder's letter?" he asked abruptly.

Collini rose, pulled out a drawer of his desk and went through a letter basket there. He went through it three times before he showed alarm. "I'm certain I mixed it in the bottom of this stack," he said with a dull voice of uncertainty. He looked worried as he searched the rest of his desk.

"Is there any chance that Chadwick might have gone through those letters?" Slade asked, studying Collini.

"Hardly," Collini said. "I only received the letter yesterday and I took it with me last night, expecting to see Harder."

"Why didn't you show it to me, Guy?" Margot asked. "You didn't tell me you had it with you."

"Slipped my mind under the strain of calling on Slade," Collini said and he grinned at her, adding, "Last night when we got back from the Beach I brought it over here and left it in the letter file. I thought of taking it over to show you then but thought you'd probably gone to bed."

"Then Chadwick couldn't have seen it," Slade said thoughtfully. "Not unless—"

"Not a chance," Collini said. "He has been down on the Keys fishing for the past couple of days. His sugar-pie is probably with him."

"That gives him an alibi," Slade mused. "Even if he has to use her."

"No, it doesn't!" Margot said vehemently. "He was here last night!" Her hand involuntarily touched her eye.

"Did he do that?" Slade asked, his eyes alert again.

"Yes," she said. "He came bursting into my room after Guy brought me home. I was reading in bed. He didn't bother to knock. His face was murderous."

VI

Collini cursed softly and Slade looked thoughtful as he recalled the high esteem in which J. Gerald Chadwick had been held by the newspapers who had reported his wife's suicide.

"What was on his mind?" Slade asked.

"He accused me of making trouble for him," Margot said furiously. "He gave that woman

in Miami some jewels that had belonged to Aunt Kathryn. They were mine. Aunt Kathryn left all of her jewels to me but there were several pieces we couldn't find. But he found them and he gave them to her. I would never have known of it if I had not seen her wearing a clip that I was certain had been Aunt Kathryn's. It was in a Miami store. She didn't see me but I saw the clip. I wrote her and told her I'd have her arrested if she didn't send the things Uncle Gerry had given her back to me."

"Have you always had trouble with your uncle?" Slade asked.

"No," she told him. "I adored him when I was a child but since—" she hesitated and added, "since I grew up I've loathed him because of the way he treated Aunt Kathryn. I suppose I hadn't noticed it when I was younger. I told him last night and he lost control of himself and hit me. I was afraid he was going to kill me. He acted like an insane man. I screamed and that seemed to bring him to his senses. He left as abruptly as he came in." Slade put his hand over his eyes and rubbed his forehead while they both anxiously watched him.

"If Chadwick hasn't seen that letter he didn't call on Harder last night," Slade mused. "Of course he may have learned that the suicide note had been taken from his files. Is there any other way he might have learned that you sent the note to Harder?"

"None that I know of," Collini said and his face was expressionless. "But who else would take Harder's letter from my desk?"

"I wouldn't know, but I had hoped that you could prove that he had found it," Slade said and he took his wallet from an inner pocket, "and that he called on Harder last night and planted this there." He held up the torn packet of matches he had found on Harder's floor, with Collini's initials stamped on it.

"How about it, Collini?"

Collini's expression did not change as he looked at the little square of gold. Margot gasped and stared at it with horrified eyes. Suddenly Collini laughed and then pretended to probe the room with stealthy, searching eyes. "Didn't you find a pair of my pants with a cleaner's mark on them there, too, Slade, and maybe one of my shoes with my foot in it?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Guy!" Margot exclaimed. "If the police had found those—"

"Nuts!" Collini sneered. Then he laughed and touched her hand and said, "I'm sorry, Margot. Even the police would know I'm not dumb enough to leave a pack of my initialed matches around there."

"Nevertheless, they could be

used as evidence against you, Collini," Slade warned.

"The answer is still nuts," Collini said. "You know, too, I'm not that stupid."

"I'll concede you that," Slade said and he rose. "Suppose you take me over to Chadwick's house and explain your theory of how he killed his wife."

Surrounding the colonial house, a smaller edition of the main building, was another hybiscus hedge and the bright green lawn was dotted with flower beds. Climbing one wall was a riot of color that was a flame vine in bloom.

They went up the front steps and through the doorway of the house and into a long, cool hallway, furnished in good taste with fine old antiques. Margot led them up the curving stairway to the second floor and down the upstairs hallway to the next to the last room.

"That's my uncle's bedroom," she told them, pointing at the open door of the last room. "His study is just below it." She opened the closed door of the room in front of them and said, "This was my aunt's room." Slade strolled around the room and opened the French doors that led to a second story balcony that ran the whole length of the house in the rear. The balcony looked down on a formal garden and through the trees the blue waters of Biscayne Bay sparkled in the ephemeral sunlight.

"Which is your room?" Slade asked Margot as they stepped out on the balcony.

"At the other end," Margot said pointing.

"There are no connecting doors between any of the rooms?"

"No," Margot told him. "You have to go out on the balcony or into the front hallway to get from any of the bedrooms into another."

"And both the French doors leading to the balcony and the door to the hallway were locked on the inside when the maid smelled gas the morning of your aunt's death?"

"Yes," Margot said. "She had never locked her doors before."

"Her aunt," Collini said, "always had a glass of sherry before she went to bed and Chadwick always got it for her. Margot thinks Chadwick slipped a couple of sleeping pills, or something, into her wine that night. After she was sleeping soundly, we figure, Chadwick went into her room, closed the French doors and locked them and then turned on the gas log, part way. Then he went out into the hallway, locked the door behind him and took the key.

"In the morning when the maid screamed Chadwick was waiting in his room for the maid to smell gas. He rushed out, and

then, too quickly, we think, grabbed a bronze door stop that was outside his door and broke in a panel of Mrs. Chadwick's door. He had the key in his hand and unlocked her door from the inside. The maid wouldn't have known he had the key in his hand. She swore at the inquest that the door had been locked from the inside."

"And the suicide note was on a table beside her bed?" Slade said.

"That's right," Margot said. "What do you think, Mr. Slade?"

"I think, to put it mildly," Slade said, "that all you have is a little imagination." He put his hand up as Collini started to interrupt. "Wait a minute," he said. "Harder wrote you that the suicide note was a forgery. But somebody has the note and Harder is dead. The prosecutor wouldn't touch it."

"I was only going to say," Collini said, "that I agree with you. It seemed quite convincing after we'd talked it over and decided to put it in your lap, Slade. Especially after Margot changed her mind about her aunt writing the note."

Slade's eyes narrowed a trifle as he studied Collini because he detected something in Collini's statement that implied he was trying to tell Slade something that he couldn't put into words.

"You mean," Slade said, "that you're sorry you exposed your whereabouts to me?"

"Let's skip the answer to that for a couple of days, shall we, Slade? That is, if you don't turn me in," Collini said and he managed to grin. Something clicked in Slade's mind and he turned to Margot to find that she was studying him as he had been studying Collini.

"I wonder if you know," Slade said to her, "that there is a general law that prevents a person from profiting by his own crime?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand that," Margot said.

"What he's trying to tell you, honey, is that if we can prove your uncle committed murder to get your aunt's money he will have to forfeit the money he inherited and it will go to you," Collini said gently. "Isn't that right, Slade?"

"Substantially," Slade said.

"That's something I didn't know," Margot said thoughtfully.

"Then why," Slade asked, "are you trying to convince me that your uncle did it, hoping I can help you prove it?"

"I told you I loathe him!" she said passionately. "He—he broke my aunt's heart and I loved her dearly."

"And she's afraid, too, Slade, that the cops might hang it around my neck if they find me here," Collini said.

"I see," Slade said and now he was thoughtful. "Did your uncle talk about anything beside the trouble you were making for him about the jewels, last night?" he asked in a moment. "You must remember that if this was murder everything, every word can be important. Did he threaten you?"

"Heavens, yes!" she exclaimed. "He hit me! He was so violent and I was so frightened I can't remember everything he said."

"Where does that woman live in Miami?" Slade asked. "I want to talk to Chadwick." Margot gave him the woman's name and address and he copied it down in his notebook.

"You'll be back here later, Slade?" Collini said, making it more a statement than a question. "I want to talk to you."

"You're going to have plenty of time to talk to me," Slade said grimly. "Mind if I look around your aunt's room a bit more?" he asked Margot, moving toward the French doors.

"Of course not," she said and they all entered the room where Mrs. Chadwick had died.

Slade wandered around it, stopping to inspect the French doors this time. There were two vertical bolts on the left hand door, one that pushed into the casing above the door and one that pushed down into a metal receptacle in the floor.

Near the inner stile of the right hand door, about chest high, a flat wrought-iron catch was securely fastened that dropped into a keeper on the left hand door and would hold both doors securely if the two bolts on the left hand door were fastened. There was a flat astragal which acted as a stop between the doors and would prevent anyone from inserting a thin piece of metal between them to lift the latch from the outside. Slade studied them for a moment and then turned back to Margot and Collini.

He shrugged his shoulders and they all went silently out the door to the hallway and down the curving stairs to the lower hall. Just as they reached it Beth Harmon, Chadwick's secretary, came out of his study at the end of the hall. Slade, watching her approach, saw that she wasn't the type who would draw wolf calls and whistles. She was pretty in a wholesome, refreshing way, with sparkling gray eyes, very light hair that would shimmer like cornsilk in the sun, and she moved with unconscious grace.

Slade saw Collini drop one eyelid when the girl was a few feet away. Margot smiled at her and the girl smiled back but Slade gathered that neither of them meant it.

"This is Martin Slade, Beth," Collini said with his best smile.

He's a lawyer and ex-judge advocate. Got anything you want to confess to him?"

She smiled at Slade and touched her cheek with a forefinger as she stopped to ponder. "Well," she said, her eyes twinkling, "there's the dime I stole from the kitchen sugar bowl when I was five and—"

"The statute of limitations clears you on that one," Slade said and he wondered what the two-timing Collini had that was so attractive to women. "Any kind of larceny recently?" he added. She colored as Collini laughed, and went on.

"Are you going to turn me in, Slade?" Collini whispered as Margot watched the girl go down the hallway.

"Not yet, Guido," Slade said, "but—"

He stopped speaking as the screened door behind them opened and a statuesque blonde came gliding through the doorway. Her plucked eyebrows and mascara-touched eyelids made her angry brown eyes seem enormous. Her upper lip was made into an artful bow with scarlet lipstick and her lower lip was full and sensuous. She moved gracefully on her long legs and although she was slim she seemed voluptuous.

The man behind her was easily three inches shorter than she. But his dignity and assurance compensated for his lack of stature and he carried himself with an air of quiet authority. Gray tinged his brown hair at the temples to add to his distinction and his intelligent light blue eyes were cold and alert.

"Oh, bru-uther!" Slade heard Collini murmur behind him. Aloud he said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Chadwick."

"Afternoon, Guy," Chadwick said. His eyes swept past Margot to Slade.

"Martin Slade, Mr. Chadwick," Collini said. A brief smile flicked Chadwick's lips but not his eyes as he bowed.

"Miss Worthington," Chadwick said crisply. "My niece, Miss Phillips. Mr. Collini. Mr. Slade." They murmured words, except Miss Worthington. She fastened her gaze on Margot. It was venomous.

"Gerald and I," she said to Margot, enunciating each word distinctly, "are going to be married here the day after tomorrow. We want you and all of your things out of here before then."

J. Gerald Chadwick nodded his head and crinkled his cold eyes with amusement as Margot's face drained of color. Her mouth opened but when no words came she covered it with the tips of her fingers. But almost instantly she had recovered her poise and when she took her hand away from her mouth she was smiling. She held the tall girl's gaze as

she said, "You can't, not even you, *dear* uncle, make a silk purse out of a sow's ear!"

The scarlet lips gasped and the brown eyes spat venom as the woman's nostrils moved with each quick breath she drew. She put her weight on the balls of her feet and hunched her shoulders. As she started toward Margot her long, painted fingernails rose and she made an animal noise in her throat. Collini stepped in front of her and apologized as they collided. Margot turned and started up the curving stairs. She didn't turn her head until she reached the top. There she turned and bowed with a little smile on her lips before she disappeared down the hallway. Slade felt like applauding.

"I'm sorry, Gerald," the Worthington woman said. She smiled at him and touched his arm to beseech forgiveness. Chadwick crinkled his eyes and said, "Let's go into my study." They started down the hallway.

"Mr. Chadwick," Slade called after him. Chadwick turned.

"When can I have a short talk with you?" Slade asked.

"Phone for an appointment, please," Chadwick said. They went into his study and the door closed behind him.

"He's going to make me do it the hard way," Slade said and shrugged his shoulders. He turned to Collini and said, "You stay here and keep your eyes open. I'm going back upstairs. If Chadwick comes out slip up and tell me. You'd better get up on the stairs."

"Where will you be?"

"In Mrs. Chadwick's room," Slade said.

"Right," Collini said and he looked pleased.

The thick covering on the stairs and on the upper hallway made Slade's footsteps soundless. The door to Margot's room was closed as he expected it would be. When he was in Mrs. Chadwick's room he went over to the French doors and ran his hand along the inner stile of the right hand door. Excitement welled up within him as he nodded his head and made an experiment. When he slipped quietly out of Mrs. Chadwick's room a few minutes later Margot was coming down the hallway toward him.

She was startled for a fleeting moment. Then she smiled guilelessly and said, "Oh, dear, I thought for an instant you were my uncle. I—I don't think I ever want to see him again."

"You'll probably be able to adjust things with him later," Slade said as they went down the stairs side by side.

He offered no explanation of his presence on the upper floor as she seemed preoccupied and uninterested in why he was there. She was dressed for the street

in a dark blue linen, sun-back dress, blue and white open-toed shoes, white hoop earrings and her chestnut hair with its glints of gold was coiled about her head like a golden halo.

"Honey-bee," Collini said as they joined him at the bottom of the steps, "you look good enough to eat." She laid her fingers on his cheek and he added, "Whither bound?"

"I'm going over to The Everglades to talk to Sarah Tremper," she said. "Perhaps I can move in with her for a time, or we might look for an apartment together."

"You poor kid!" Collini said earnestly as the three of them went out on the front porch and down the steps together.

Slade, watching them, experienced a surge of compassion for both of them. But it was only transitory as a vision of Beth Harmon and Collini locked in each other's arms floated before his mind's eye.

"Would Beth Harmon have had any reason to turn on the gas in your aunt's room?" he asked Margot suddenly as he watched Collini.

"Hell, no!" Collini blazed.

"Good," Slade said and he smiled at Collini's reaction as Margot looked up at him with faint surprise.

"I suppose anyone who was here is a suspect in your mind—if my aunt didn't commit suicide," Margot said to him. Slade nodded.

"You going to be around for a bit longer, Slade?" Collini asked as they stopped beside Slade's rented car.

"No," Slade said. "I've got to be back at Dolphin Beach by three to take an important telephone call from New York. And I want a quiet place to give this thing some thought. I'll telephone Chadwick a little later and make an appointment with him, so I'll be back."

"Why don't you try to have a cocktail with Guy and me at The Cloisters—an inn just up the street—at about seven?" Margot asked. "We always meet there for a drink at that time, if we can."

"Delighted if I can work it out," Slade answered as he climbed in his car and turned the ignition key to start it. "I'll telephone Collini." He touched his forehead with the tips of his fingers and started out the winding driveway, leaving them in conversation.

He was to deep in thought that he hardly noticed the heavy traffic that hemmed him in after he cut into Route 1. After he had crossed the Miami River he parked near Bay Front Park and ambled around the nearby streets for a half hour. He arrived back at his cottage at Dolphin Beach just in time to take the New York telephone call. When he

had finished he went into the kitchen, took a bottle of beer from the icebox and was about to open it when the telephone rang again.

He went out, picked the telephone out of its cradle and said, "Slade speaking."

"This is Sybil Fay, Mr. Slade," a husky feminine voice said in his ear. "They tell me you want some information about Gerald Chadwick?"

The voice paused.

"I'm interested," Slade said cautiously.

"I can't tell you anything over the telephone," the husky voice said, "but come down to my place and I may be able to help. It's the Domino Club on San Miguel Island on the Venetian Causeway. Ask a cop on Belle Island, after you get on the causeway, and he'll tell you how to find me."

"Now?" Slade asked.

"As soon as you can get here," the voice urged. "Before I change my mind.

VII

While Slade drank the bottle of beer he got Collini's friend, Charles Terrill on the telephone in Miami and explained who he was. Terrill told him Collini was waiting for him in the lobby of his apartment building when he came home at ten o'clock the night before and that they had talked for about a half hour before Collini departed.

"Collini and the Phillips girl," Slade reflected, "would have had time to drive down to Echo Terrace to drill a couple of shots into Harder's back before they crossed the MacArthur Causeway and Collini went to see Terrill. Or, if Collini dropped Margot in front of The Everglades he would have had time to cross the causeway, shoot Harder and get back by ten." It would have taken close timing, he knew, but it could have been done. But Slade knew Collini was not stupid enough to overlook the torn packet of matches he had found on Harder's floor.

A few moments later he had the Coquina Sanatorium on the telephone and asked for Mr. Chadwick. He recognized the voice that came on the wire as Beth Harmon's. He gave his name and asked to speak to Chadwick.

"Just a moment, please, Mr. Slade," she said.

"What is it, please," Chadwick's clipped voice asked.

"I'd like to have a talk with you this evening," Slade said.

"What about?" Chadwick asked.

"Your wife's death," Slade said. There was a long pause after Slade heard Chadwick draw in his breath.

"About nine-thirty?" Chadwick asked.

"I'll be there," Slade replied.

He finished the beer, stuck a small automatic in his pocket and went out to his car. It began to rain again, a brief tropical shower, as he drove down AIA and cut over Dade Boulevard when he was on the Beach. He asked a policeman on Belle Island how to find the Domino Club on San Miguel, thanked him and drove on.

The Domino Club was an old mansion, with two single-story wings, that stood about two hundred feet back from the sparkling waters of Biscayne Bay. The original building was modeled along the same colonial lines as the Coquina Sanatorium. But the new wings, with heavy draperies pulled across all the windows, were modern. There were two boat houses at the water's edge, beyond the beautifully kept grounds.

"Miss Fay in her office on the second floor, sar," a big West Indian, with an ornate uniform of red and gold, informed him as he parked his car alongside many others in one of the two large parking spaces at each end of the wings.

Inside a small, dapper man wearing a midnight blue dinner jacket, with a bachelor's button in the lapel, yawned and came toward him with a half dozen menus in his hand. Behind him, projected on a frosted glass screen a pack of greyhounds thundered silently by, followed by a series of nude women, and then a string of racing horses.

Behind the frosted glass Slade could see the bottoms of stools on which small and large feet were hooked that told him the bar was there. Seductive music came from behind a bank of flowers in the cocktail room to the right and there was the constant babble of voices and the swift movement of bus boys and waiters.

"One, sir?" the headwaiter asked as he spread the menus and exposed a row of gleaming false teeth.

"I have an appointment with Miss Fay," Slade said.

"So?" the man said softly and his eyes flitted over Slade. "Second floor, to the left," he added, indicating a door in the screen.

His teeth flashed again.

Slade went through the doorway and up a dim stairway covered with heavy carpet. At the head of the stairs he turned to the left and saw an anti-room. At the back of it was a red door. A dim light at the top illuminated white letters that spelled PRIVATE. He assumed he would find Miss Fay there.

He didn't notice the big man with the bulging muscles who was sitting behind the door that opened into the anti-room. He had nearly reached the red door when the big man came out of his chair with surprising agility

and grasped him by the shoulder.

"You lookin' f'r someone, buster?" he growled.

"Miss Fay," Slade said and tried to twist away from the painful grasp on his shoulder.

The man tightened his grip and as he lifted his right hand Slade saw the brass knuckles. Anger welled up in him, and he didn't wait to find out if the big man was going to use the knuckles. He yanked out of his grasp, pivoting as he did it and slammed him on the jaw. The big man didn't even blink as he started a punch with the hand that wore the brass knuckles.

Slade caught the brass knuckles with his left palm and slashed his adversary across his Adam's apple with the side of his hand. As the man doubled and gagged Slade took two steps, opened the door marked private, entered, and closed the door behind him.

The platinum blonde who looked thirty under the soft lights of the room glanced up with mild surprise as he closed the door. Her green eyes were knowing but were softened by the matching green dress she was wearing. She was as smart and glistening as the diamonds that flashed on her fingers.

Another big man with a mop of red hair was sitting in a chair beside the woman's leather-topped desk. When he turned his head Slade saw that his pink skin was liberally speckled with freckles and his blue-grey eyes were sullen and bitter. His ears and mouth were too large. Overall he was so startling that he was attractive in a decidedly masculine way.

"Greetings," the woman said and when she laughed the hardness left her face. "Didn't you see the sign on the door or can't you read?"

Slade blew on his knuckles and said, "That gorilla outside must be chewing iron." The red-headed man half rose and Slade slid a hand into his side pocket because the red-head was bigger than the one outside and younger —about twenty-eight.

"I'm Martin Slade. I take it you're Miss Fay?"

She blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke. "I forgot to tell Ernie you were coming," she said. "If he made trouble you should have told him you had an appointment with me."

"I only had time to speak your name once," Slade said.

"Tell Ernie on your way out," Sybil Fay said to the red-headed man beside her, "to learn to use those brass knuckles or go back to his black-jack."

The man got up with his eyes fixed on Slade. As he closed the door Sybil Fay rose and extended her hand. She had a beautiful figure and her hand was warm and soft. She smiled as she said, "Peo-

ple you don't want in get in in flocks, but people you want to see have to fight their way in. I'm sorry."

She sat down on a leather seat that ran along one side of the room behind a tabouret. She brought out a bucket of ice cubes, glasses, a bottle of good Scotch, soda and raised her eyes. Slade nodded. She poured two drinks and when they were ready handed one to Slade and raised her glass.

Slade touched it with his own and was startled when she said, "Wasn't that a gorgeous hunk of man who just left?"

Slade smiled and her voice was a little thick as she added, "His name is Merton—Doug Merton. I worked my first husband into his grave to get all this and now I'm working myself to death to keep Doug happy. He likes the things I can give him but he doesn't love me."

She laughed at the worried frown on Slade's face and said, "I'm telling you all this because he's in love with that nasty little chippie who tries to be high-society and has the heart of a Russian pawn-broker — Margot Phillips, old Chadwick's niece."

"So?" Slade said giving it the same inflection as the headwaiter downstairs.

"She's nuts about him too," Sybil Fay told him and Slade saw her throat swell. "She had a chance at him and muffed it. Doug was working for Chadwick when she fell in love with him. When Chadwick and his wife found out about it they accused Doug of rigging the books and tapping the till. They'd have prosecuted him if I hadn't given them the money they claimed he stole. They really framed him. Chadwick, the mealy-mouthed hypocrite, objected to Doug's living here, while he, Chadwick, was all tangled up with a long-legged strumpet in Miami."

"That seems unreasonable of Chadwick," Slade said and he laughed. He was trying to keep her talking. "How did you know that I was interested in Chadwick?"

"I've had a man tailing his niece," she said. "She's up to something and I'm trying to find out what it is because she has Doug mixed up in it too. I thought you might help me. I telephoned you as soon as my man told me because I know who you are. We have channels in this business. If I can get something on that mealy-mouthed Chadwick, or his niece, I'll really turn the screws."

"The Chadwicks aren't your favorite family, are they?" Slade asked and he was astonished by the eloquence of her indictment of the Chadwicks and all their ancestry.

"I hate all three of them for what they did to Doug," she ended.

"There are only two of them now," Slade said in a conversational tone. "You didn't start getting even by feeding gas to Mrs. Chadwick, did you, Sybil?"

"If you mean did I kill her, the answer is no," she laughed. "But it would have been a pleasure."

"Do you know where your boy Doug was that night?" Slade asked.

"I wouldn't know," she said, "but I can put him any place I want him."

"No doubt," said Slade. "But why doesn't he marry Margot and get in line for the money her aunt left her. She's over twenty-one."

"Twenty-five," she said and added, "Because she's already married." Slade took a sip of his drink to hide his surprise.

"Nobody is supposed to know it but as I said I have channels," Sybil Fay told him. "She was secretly married to that good-looking Italian who has Doug's old job."

Slade took a longer drink this time to hide his complete astonishment. But he didn't. Sybil Fay smiled with amusement.

"Chadwick will railroad Collins to the pokey for life and have their marriage annulled if he learns she is married to him," she went on.

"Why?" Slade asked.

"Because of the way Mrs. Chadwick left her money," she said. "Mrs. Chadwick left each of them half but they don't get the principal for four years. She was pretty sure Doug wouldn't marry Margot and that Chadwick's long-legged hussy wouldn't marry him unless they had the principal. If either Chadwick or Margot should die all of the principal goes to the survivor. But if either of them marries and then dies the surviving widow or widower inherits. Mrs. Chadwick thought they would prevent each other from marrying if she left it that way and they couldn't get it for four years."

"Pretty complicated, isn't it?" Slade said. "How did you learn all this?"

"I told you I have channels, Mr. Slade," she said.

"They must be good," Slade said as he put down his empty glass. "I wonder," he asked after a few moments of silence while he tried to organize what she had told him, "if I could talk to Merton for a few minutes?"

She rose to press a button on her desk. The door opened and the big watch dog from outside appeared. His claws made fists as he looked at Slade. Sybil laughed.

"See if you can find Doug and bring him up here, Ernie," she ordered. Ernie looked disappointed as he stared at Slade again before he closed the door behind him.

"Does Margot see Doug?" Slade asked.

"All the time," she said sadly. "He doesn't know I've been having her tailed lately and tells me he doesn't." She sighed. "It's hard. Of course Collins doesn't know about it." Slade wondered.

Ernie came back and said Doug had driven away and no one knew where he had gone. "My car and my gas to take him to see that Phillips twerp," Sybil said bitterly. "Just how big a damn fool can a woman be, Mr. Slade?"

"Sometimes," Slade said dryly, "the scope is tremendous."

"Well, I asked for it," she said as she rose. "I have a little more work to do," she said. "Why don't you go downstairs and lose a couple of dollars while I'm finishing up and then have dinner with me? After," she added, "you've had a chance to think over the things I've told you."

Slade said he would be delighted and she stuck her head out the doorway and told Ernie to spread the word around that anything Mr. Slade wanted was on the house. Slade followed Ernie down the dim stairs and after Ernie had spoken to the headwaiter he smiled at Slade as though he had given him a fifty-dollar tip.

Slade's mind was a confusion of overlapping thoughts as he went by the sharp-faced attendant at the entrance to the luxuriously furnished wing used for gambling. The facts he had learned and the theories he had formed from them had been completely disarrayed when he learned that Margot Phillips and Guido Collini were married.

He watched, without seeing, the crowd around the roulette wheel. He turned away and idly watched a woman throw a seven while she implored the dice to show two deuces. He studied the two unused green baize tables that were for cards and the table for chemin de fer. He shook his head impatiently and went out to the bar and climbed on a high red leather stool in a corner. He ordered a Scotch and soda and stared into the mirror in front of him.

He had taken his third sip of the drink and was mulling over Sybil Fay's statement that Chadwick would railroad Collini to jail for life if he found out Margot was married to him when it began to dawn. The gnawing in his mind stopped and suddenly the whole thing opened up like a birdseye panorama.

He collided with two people getting to the front entrance. The headwaiter called something to him as he went through the doorway. He jammed the key into the ignition of his rented car and nearly backed over the big West Indian who had run over to help him.

He hoped he was going to be in time to prevent another murder.

VIII

Slade's tires screamed as he slammed on his brakes and eased up behind a car that was just being admitted through the gateway at the Coquina Sanatorium. As the other car moved forward the guard came toward Slade, then jumped hurriedly back as Slade accelerated and shot around the car in front of him. He went down the driveway and past the big main building to bring his car to a rocking halt in front of the colonial house where Chadwick lived.

His finger was on the bell an instant later. He didn't wait for someone to answer. He opened the screened door and saw two uniformed servants huddled together as he stepped into the hallway. They stared at him in silence as he hurried toward Chadwick's study. He knocked sharply on the door while the two women behind him muffled their whispers with their hands.

He opened the door and stepped inside. One shuddering glance told him he had not hurried enough. Chadwick was sprawled on the floor in a widening pool of blood, his arms and legs grotesquely spread. He bent over and saw that a bullet had struck him near the nape of the neck and had left his face an unrecognizable smear of blood in its upward trajectory. Gingerly he rolled the gruesome bulk that had been Chadwick half over to see if there was a gun beneath him. He searched the floor hurriedly but could find no weapon.

The two servants, one in white and one in black, were still huddled, like two rain-soaked chickens, when he went back into the hallway. Their eyes were round and frightened as they fumbled with their aprons. Only the steady buzz of a fly on the window behind them and the asthmatic breathing of the maid broke the taut silence.

"I'll never cook another meal in this house," the woman in white said as he approached them. "Is—is there something wrong in there?" she asked Slade. He didn't answer as her quavering voice went on fumbling with words. "We—we heard something we both thought was a backfire. Then we decided it was too close. Leila knocked on the door but he wouldn't answer."

"Is Miss Worthington still here?" Slade asked.

They both sniffed.

"He took her to Miami and come back," the maid said.

"Anyone call on him since he came back?" Slade asked.

"Just Mr. Collins," the maid said. "They had some words. I heard them shouting through the door. Mr. Collins acted upset when he went out."

"Do you know where he went?"

"I heard him shout at Mr. Chadwick that he was going to meet Miss Phillips at The Cloisters, an'—an—they'd be back here," she told him after a moment of hesitation. "Is—is there something wrong with Mr. Chadwick?" she added, her voice trembling.

"Decidedly," Slade said. "Don't either of you leave the house. The police will be here in a few minutes."

Slade went back into the study and dialed police headquarters on the telephone. He gave his name and asked for Chief Simmons.

"Hello, Marty," Chief Simmons drawled in his ear.

Slade sighed. "You remember I told you a couple of days ago you weren't going to rope me in again while I was on vacation?"

"Did you call up to remind me?" Simmons asked and chuckled.

"I called to report a homicide," Slade said.

Simmons laughed. "How about comin' down and havin' a drink with—"

"I'm serious, Vance," Slade broke in. "It's J. Gerald Chadwick director of the Coquina Sanatorium. Shot through the back of the neck."

"No!" Simmons said. "Are you there? Did you find him?"

"I found him," Slade said.

"We'll be there in a few minutes."

"Wait a minute," Slade shouted. "You'd better have someone pick up Chadwick's niece and the man with her at The Cloisters, an inn around the corner from here."

"Sure enough," Simmons said and hung up.

He put the phone back in its cradle and the only sound in the room was the ticking of an old Seth Thomas mantle clock and the flapping of one of the French doors that led to the stone terrace outside. Slade made a hasty search of the room before he heard the police sirens screaming.

Slade was waiting in the hallway when Chief of Police Simmons, the medical examiner and his assistant, a bevy of technicians, prosecutor's men, a Lieutenant Naylor and his teammate Sergeant Barden, and a half dozen minor Homicide men arrived.

After a cursory examination they drove everyone out of Chadwick's study while the technicians did their work. Slade went into the living room across from the study with Chief Simmons, Lieutenant Naylor and Sergeant Barden.

Simmons, a tall, slow-speaking Southerner with a thin, lined face and shrewd black eyes allowed a slight smile to curl one corner of his mouth as he said, "Can't keep your nose clean, eh? What's the story?"

"It's a long one," Slade said,

"and will keep for the moment." He shook his head and said regretfully, "I wanted to ask him some questions about his wife's suicide."

"What questions?" Naylor snapped. "I handled that. It was cut and dried."

Slade sighed. He had clashed with Naylor before. Naylor had been with Homicide for twenty years and he was all cop. He wasn't spectacular but he was tough, merciless and thorough. He believed that all criminals were born criminals and could not be rehabilitated. And his assistant, Sergeant Barden, a smaller man with the sharp face of a ferret, worked so smoothly with him that they were like a pair of new gears.

"It shouldn't have been cut and dried," Slade said mildly.

Naylor bristled. "I never learned nothing to make me feel different," he snarled.

"Nor me either," Sergeant Barden said, like an echo.

"You'll learn it now," Slade said. Then he stopped speaking as a plainclothes man appeared in the doorway. With him were Margot and Collini. "You told them?" Slade asked the plainclothes man. He nodded.

There was silent appeal in Margot's eyes as she crossed the room and buried her face on Slade's chest and clung to him. He could feel her trembling against him. The muscles in Collini's face were working as he searched the faces in the room. The medical examiner appeared in the doorway and beckoned to Simmons. Naylor and Barden followed him into Chadwick's study.

"I heard you had some words with Chadwick this evening," Slade said to Collini over Margot's shoulder. Collini's eyes bored into Slade as he nodded his head emphatically.

"You told him that you were married to Margot?" Slade hazarded.

He felt Margot's body twitch against him but she didn't lift her face. A question mark came into Collini's eyes as he nodded. Then, as he turned his head he looked sick as he saw Beth Harmon standing in the hallway.

She was wearing a filmy, pale blue dinner dress. Her lovely face was white and she was out of breath from hurrying. She came across the room and gently put her hand on Margot's shoulder.

"Is there some brandy, or whiskey handy?" Slade asked her.

"In the pantry," Beth Harmon said.

"She'd better have some," Slade said. He touched Margot's wrists and stepped away from her. She followed Beth Harmon into the pantry.

"Margot thought we ought to tell him we were married after Chadwick's babe blew her top this afternoon," Collini said as

the pantry door swung shut. How did you know?"

"What did he say when you told him?" Slade asked, ignoring Collini's question.

"Among other things he fired me," Collini said and he shrugged. "What difference does it make now?"

"You'd arranged to meet Margot at The Cloisters after you left Chadwick," Slade said. "Was she waiting for you?"

"No. I had a couple of drinks with Val, the bartender, before she came in," Collini said and his eyes were probing Slade's. "Why?"

As the door of Chadwick's study opened Simmons and the two Homicide men came out. Slade ignored Collini's question again and went out into the hallway to whisper in Simmon's ear.

"The hell you say!" Simmons snapped. He beckoned to Barden and whispered an order to him with Naylor listening.

"If you'll play along with me, Vance, I think I can wrap this one up for you," Slade said quietly. "And another one with it."

Naylor began to grumble loudly until Simmons put up a hand and brusquely told him to shut up.

Margot was sipping a small glass of brandy, with Beth Harmon and Collini beside her as Slade, Naylor and Simmons went back into the living room. Slade called Beth Harmon aside and asked her in another whisper if she would take a transcript of what would be said in a few minutes. Her forthright eyes studied Slade's for a moment. Then she nodded and got a notebook and pencils from the top drawer of a Governor Winthrop secretary that stood against a wall.

They were standing like patrons in the lobby of a theater waiting for the buzzer to tell them the curtain was going up when Barden came into the room carrying something in a towel. He stopped in front of Collini and uncovered the .38 automatic he carried.

"I found this stuffed under the mattress in Collins' room," he said, "just as Slade told the Chief we would. And one buck gets you ten that it fired the bullet they dug out of Chadwick's study a few minutes ago!"

His face was grim.

Collini stared down at the vicious automatic as Margot began to sob.

IX

"I'll—I'll be next, don't you see I will?" Margot sobbed as she went to Slade and beat her hands against the lapels of his jacket. Her eyes were frantic as she gazed up at him. "He's a monster. I didn't realize that after I found out about his police

record he wanted me to marry him to protect him."

"Does this man have a police record, Slade?" Naylor bellowed.

"You ought to know," Slade said. "He has been under your nose for over a year."

"We can find out quick enough, Slade," Simmons said, his thin face cold and angry. "What are you trying to do?"

"I'll save you the trouble," Slade said. "I was on the state parole board up north when he was paroled. It was mostly due to my efforts that he was paroled." He looked at Collini accusingly. "But he never reported to his parole officer. He vanished."

"How did you know he was here?" Simmons demanded.

"I didn't," Slade said quietly. "Miss Phillips and he came to me last night to ask for my help. Only her name isn't Phillips any longer. They're married. It's Collins or Collini. That's his name—Guido Collini."

"What was he in for?" Simmons asked incredulously.

"A hold-up in which a policeman was shot," Slade said.

"And you let him loose last night, a hold-up punk, with a gun!" Naylor snarled.

"He — he's a cold-blooded murderer!" Margot broke in hysterically. "He charmed me into marrying him the way a venomous snake charms a bird. When he learned I would inherit a part of my aunt's money he killed her. I was sure he had but I was afraid of him. Deathly afraid. That's why I agreed to come to you last night, Mr. Slade. I was certain that you, knowing of his police record, would find out that he and not my uncle killed my aunt. Now he has killed them both."

Her eyes were bright as she paused and dramatically pointed at Beth Harmon. "He wasn't in love with me when he married me. He was in love with her." Beth Harmon's face flushed but she didn't lift her eyes from the notebook on the Winthrop desk.

"Put some cuffs on him, Naylor," Simmons snapped.

"No!" Slade said. "He's in my custody."

"You have no authority here, Slade," Simmons barked.

"You said you'd play along with me," Slade barked back. "I'll answer for him. He told me he jumped parole because he was afraid he'd be killed by the hoodlums who didn't like his testimony at his own trial. He managed to get a job here where he wouldn't be noticed. And you didn't notice him, even when you had a murder right under your nose."

"Look, Chief!" Naylor said. "If you—"

"But something happened here before he came," Slade said, ignoring Naylor. "Miss

Phillips fell in love with the man who had Collini's job before him —Douglas Merton. She wanted to marry him but when Chadwick and his wife learned of it they framed Merton for alleged embezzlement. He was fired in disgrace and that seemed to be the end of it. You remember, Naylor, that Mrs. Chadwick left a suicide note?" Naylor growled. "Collini found it in Chadwick's files and sent it to a graphologist along with a specimen of Mrs. Chadwick's handwriting."

"The graphologist was Carl Harder," Margot interposed. "He wouldn't give the note back to Guy, so Guy went there and shot him to get it."

"Why, you lying little—" Collini shouted.

"That's right, Chief!" Naylor roared. "Harder was murdered last night!"

"I reported the homicide to the Beach police," Slade put in calmly. "I found Harder with two holes in his back. I went to see him to check on what Collini and Margot had told me. I found him dead."

"The papers said the person who reported it wouldn't give their name!" Naylor bellowed. "You walked out on a homicide!"

"Be quiet," Slade snapped. "I checked with Margot and Collini this morning and they both had fairly good alibis for the time Harder was killed. But I'll go back to that. They told me last night they thought Chadwick had drugged his wife the night she died. Then he locked both of the doors to her room after he had turned on the gas. They thought he had the key to the hall door in his hand after he broke the panel and unlocked it from the inside. But if you'll follow me upstairs I'll show you how it was done."

"Everyone knows who did it, Mr. Slade," Margot sobbed. "Won't you let them put handcuffs on him?"

"All right, Naylor," Slade said. "Put 'em on if she'll feel safer."

Collini met Naylor halfway, extending his wrists, his face expressionless as the handcuffs clicked.

"There is little doubt," Slade said a few minutes later as they distributed themselves around the room where Mrs. Chadwick had died, "that Mrs. Chadwick was drugged. After she was in a heavy sleep the person who killed her came in through the hall doorway and turned the key in the lock on the inside." Slade went through the motions of turning the lock and then went to the gas log and simulated turning it on as he said, "They then turned on the gas log."

He crossed the room to the French doors, picking up a small but heavy silver box from the dead woman's dressing table on

the way. When he stopped in front of the doors he took a thin, short nail from his pocket and after running his fingers over the inner stile of the right hand door he inserted the nail in the small hole his fingers found, tapping it with the silver box to set it securely.

"If the police had been vigilant the morning they found Mrs. Chadwick," he went on, glancing at Chief Simmons and then on to the glowering face of Lieutenant Naylor, "they would have found a nail in this door, just as I have placed this one. Under the stress of the moment Mr. Chadwick broke a panel in the hall door. Was it because he didn't want to attract attention to these doors, that would have been much easier to open?"

Slade lifted the wrought iron catch on the door and rested it upright, against the nail. "Watch the latch," he said. He smiled faintly, and his audience scarcely breathed as he stepped out on the balcony and pulled the door carefully closed behind him, giving it a short, sharp jerk just before he fully closed it.

They all stared in speechless wonder as they saw the little wrought iron latch drop precisely into the keeper on the left hand door to lock it. Slade was still smiling faintly as he tapped on the glass of the door. Naylor came out of his wide-eyed trance and stepped over to raise the latch.

"Are you trying to tell us that Chadwick killed his wife and then shot himself through the back of the head!" he sneered as Slade stepped back into the room.

"No," Slade said crisply. "I'm not. Be patient a moment." He faced his audience again and said, "You all know that when Mrs. Chadwick died she left over a half million dollars equally divided between her niece and her husband. It was to be held in trust for four years, after which the principal was to be divided between them. If one of them died within those four years the survivor was to inherit all of it. But if either of them married within those four years, and then died, their share was to go to the surviving widow or widower.

"Mrs. Chadwick, I surmise, left her money with that stipulation hoping her niece and husband would agree not to marry within those four years. She believed, and again it's conjecture, that if they didn't marry within that time Chadwick would not marry Miss Worthington. Nor would Margot marry Merton.

"This afternoon when I came here I believed that neither of them was married. But while I was here Mr. Chadwick came in with Miss Worthington and Miss Worthington emphatically

told Margot that she and Chadwick were going to be married, here in this house, within two days. And with Chadwick's agreement she emphasized that they wanted Margot and all of her things out of here before then."

As Slade stopped speaking he was aware that Margot, as she wept into her handkerchief, was being regarded with sympathetic eyes and troubled faces.

"Please, *please,*" she begged with a stifled voice. "Must we go into any more of this now?"

"This is no court room, Slade!" Simmons growled as he placed a comforting hand on Margot's shoulder. "No one doubts that an investigation will prove that Collini, an ex-convict with a motive, did it."

"I doubt it!" Slade said quietly.

"Who else could have done it?" Margot gasped as she lifted her face from her handkerchief.

"You could have," Slade said.

There was an indignant gasp as Margot said, "You're being ridiculous again, Mr. Slade. This is no time for banter!"

"I quite agree with you. It's a time for truth. But I have another hypothesis I'd like to develop if it won't bore you," Slade said and he shook his finger at her in a genial way. "Let's pretend," he went on his voice soft and cajoling, "that you were still in love with Doug Merton and wanted to marry him after your uncle fired him for embezzlement. He couldn't get a job and neither of you had any money. But you knew you would inherit money from your aunt. So you and Merton figured out a way to get it."

"Do you realize what you're saying, Mr. Slade?" Margot asked indignantly. "There are a lot of witnesses here, you know."

"Yes, I know," Slade said evenly. "But I'm not accusing you. I'm only pretending that you had a stroke of luck when you did a little snooping and found out that Collini had a police record. You and Merton knew that Collini would be a sitting duck to take the rap. So you agreed that he had to be kept here to take it, and the best way to keep him would be to marry him."

"Stop it, Mr. Slade!" Margot cried furiously. "If you—"

"We're only *pretending,* Margot," Slade interposed with assumed irritation and then he smiled and tapped one forefinger with the other. "Now, let's suppose that after your aunt's will was read and you learned of her stipulations that you and Merton decided that there was no—shall we say, legitimate—reason why you shouldn't get your uncle's share too?"

"Listen, Slade!" Simmons bellowed. "You may be forced to substantiate what you're saying."

"Fine," Slade said and now he waggled a finger at Simmons. "What you'd better do, is send a couple of men to the Domino Club on San Miguel to pick up Merton. You're going to need him as a material witness, if nothing else."

He turned his back on Simmons and strode the length of the room. When he turned Braden was leaving, accompanied by two Homicide men.

"Remember," Slade went on, aware of the hostile eyes around him, "that Margot didn't know, until Collini told me last night, that he had sent the suicide note he had taken from Chadwick's files and a specimen of Mrs. Chadwick's handwriting to Carl Harder. She was astonished when he told me. And watching Margot I saw she was more astonished when he told me Harder had let him know that Mrs. Chadwick didn't write the note."

"Both Chadwick and his niece swore that she had written it!" Naylor snarled.

"They were both willing to settle for suicide at that time," Slade snapped at him. "But let's go back to last night. After they left me Collini dropped Margot at The Everglades to call on a friend while Collini attended to other business. But Margot's friend wasn't in so she went to a movie on Flagler Street. She can prove that she did because the cashier took her name and address after an argument about change." He paused and looked at Margot with grudging admiration. "A neat alibi," he added.

"But," he continued, "Margot didn't care for the movie. So, let's assume that she slipped out a side entrance—the theatre has them, I looked this afternoon—and took a cab to the Beach. If she did we can find the driver who took her there. Let's assume, too, that she paid him off before she went to Harder's. She knew how to get there because she heard me give Collini directions. And after she had finished her business with Harder she dropped a torn packet of Collini's matches so that the police would find it on Harder's floor.

"*If* she took a taxi over there she had to take one back and that man will remember her, too, because men don't easily forget Margot. She slipped back into the theatre through the same side entrance and left by the front entrance at ten-twenty. On her way out she had pleasant words with a young door man who wanted to take her home. Another neat alibi. She met Collini ten minutes later."

"You're weaving a dangerous web of lies!" Margot said as she turned to Chief Simmons with open hands. "Won't you—" she began as Naylor interrupted, his jaw outthrust.

"The Beach police mentioned no pack of matches on Harder's

floor," he growled, eyeing Slade suspiciously.

"No," Slade said. "I took them with me."

"Hiding evidence, by God!" Naylor shouted impiously.

"This afternoon," Slade went on, ignoring Naylor again, "when Margot learned her uncle was going to marry Miss Worthington she immediately got in touch with Merton. They—"

"I haven't seen him in months!" Margot cried. "You lie and you know it!"

"Sybil Fay says different," Slade said and he smiled. "She has been having you tailed, Margot."

As Margot began to laugh Slade scanned the doubting faces around him to see if they realized that her simulated laughter was close to hysteria.

"After she and Merton made their plans," Slade continued, "Margot sent Collini to tell Chadwick that she and Collini were married. She knew Chadwick would be furious and he was. He flailed Collini before he fired him. The maids will testify they heard them shouting angrily at each other. Collini, Margot wanted the police to think, was the last one to see Chadwick alive.

"They had reasoned well that all the signs would point to a parole violator, who knew how to use lethal weapons, as the killer. It was a perfect set-up for a perfect crime, after Merton or Margot hid the gun that killed Chadwick in Collini's room. It was then time for Margot to expose Collini's police record and to proclaim her fear of him."

"You've gone too far, Mr. Slade!" Margot cried shrilly and Slade saw the perspiration that glistened on her upper lip and forehead.

"Not quite!" he said and whirled on Collini. "Where," he asked, "is Harder's letter."

"Hidden where no snooper can find it," he said coolly. "I couldn't tell you last night Slade, that I sent three specimens of handwriting with the suicide note to Harder. One each of Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick's and one of Margot's. I labeled them X, Y, and Z. In his letter Harder said he thought Z had written it."

"Who was Z?" Slade asked.

"Margot," Collini said. He spoke quietly but the single word boomed through the utter silence of the room like the roar of a cannon.

"You rotten bastard!" Margot screamed. Her eyes bulged as her face became distorted with rage.

"Watch her, Slade!" Collini shouted as she tore open her handbag and whipped out the ugly little automatic she had aimed at Slade the night before.

But Collini had started to move as he shouted. He swung both of his manacled wrists like a

bludgeon as Margot aimed the pistol at Slade. Both Margot and the automatic thudded to the floor before she could squeeze the trigger.

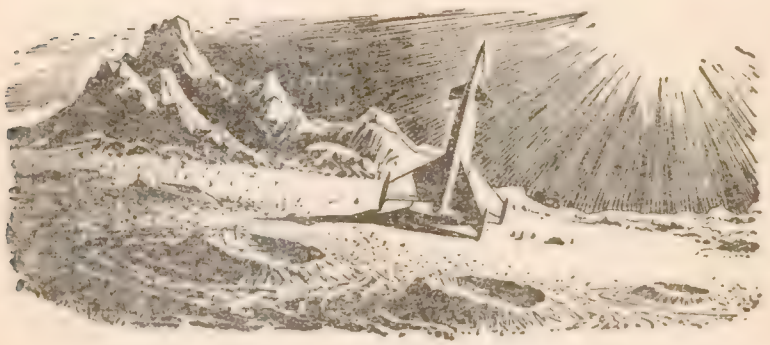
"I've been wanting to do that ever since I realized she was trying to love me into the chair!" he said glaring down at her, his lips white with rage.

There was confusion all around them as Slade put a hand on Collini's shoulder and said, "Thanks, Guido. I think ballistics will prove that little gun killed Harder. We'll get her for that one, anyway."

"Do you suppose," Collini implored in Slade's ear, "that I can beat my violation of parole? Beth will marry me if I can."

"I think you can," Slade said. "I know you've been on the up and up and that you'll stay that way."

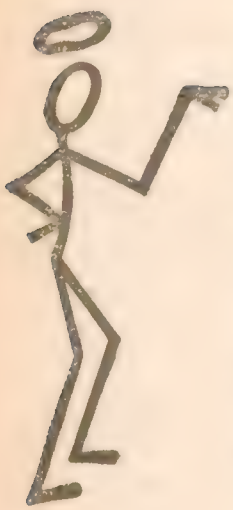
"You betcha," Collini said. He grinned from ear to ear as he added, "The black years of my sins are past and I live only for penitence and atonement."



Excitingly attuned to a mystery lover's preferences are the throbbing pulsebeats of tomorrow in the current issue of the SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *now on sale. There are pulsebeats as well of matchless entertainment which you'll hear loudly beating in the gripping novelette,* JUST AROUND THE CORNER *by William Scarff, and in the shorter gems of science fantasy by Milton Lesser, F. B. Bryning, Robert Young and Alice Jones.*

You Still Have Time...

—TO COMPLETE YOUR SAINT FILE
—OF THE WORLD'S *FINEST* FICTION
—BY THE WORLD'S *GREATEST* WRITERS
—OF MYSTERY-DETECTIVE STORIES



Here's your chance to pick up 14 of the 15 issues published to date. The first issue, we're sorry to say, is all sold out. A few copies are still available of all others and they are yours by filling in the coupon below. THE SAINT *is always star-studded by the best writers in the field. We are now offering these at bargain prices —single copies at 35¢; three copies at $1; six copies at $1.75; and twelve copies at $3.25. When ordering, circle the issues desired.*

Names to conjure with are scattered throughout all issues, for the stories are by the most famous writers of mystery, crime and detective fiction in the world—such greats as: Leslie Charteris, Ben Ames Williams, William Faulkner, Ben Hecht, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, William Irish, H. G. Wells, Damon Runyon, Octavus Roy Cohen, Sax Rohmer, T. S. Stribling, Clarence Budington Kelland, Dorothy L. Sayers, Hugh Wiley, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, Ray Bradbury, Graham Greene, Brett Halliday, P. G. Wodehouse, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Mignon G. Eberhart, Hugh Walpole, Q. Patrick, Cornell Woolrich, G. K. Chesterton, Hugh Pentecost, Leslie Ford, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Walsh, MacKinlay Kantor, Rufus King, Peter Cheyney, George Harmon Coxe, Fredric Brown, and many, many others.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Kindly send me the copies of THE SAINT whose issues I have circled below. One copy at 35¢, three copies at $1, six copies at $1.75, twelve copies at $3.25. I enclose $_____ in full payment—no additional charges for postage or handling.

JUNE '53; AUG. '53; OCT. '53; JAN. '54; MARCH '54;
MAY '54; JULY '54; SEPT. '54; OCT. '54; NOV. '54;
DEC. '54; JAN. '55; FEB. '55; MARCH '55.

Name_____

Address_____

City, Zone, State_____

SD 54

missing person

by . . . Austin Roberts

When a lonely hearts' wife turns up missing — look for a seven-letter word meaning "arsenic."

THE LITTLE MAN smiled hesitantly "It's about my wife . . ."

"What about her?" asked the bored sheriff. "Did she run out on you?"

"Oh, no," the little man said. "We only been married three months. We were happy together."

"Okay," said the sheriff. He took a blank form out of his desk, and prepared to write. "Name?"

"My name is Alvin S. George. Most people just call me 'George' —like it was my first name."

"Address?"

"We live on a two-acre ranch just north of town. It's Route Two, Box Ninety-eight."

The sheriff nodded. "What's your wife's name?"

"Emma. She was a widow. . . . Mrs. Ralph Stone, before we was married."

"Age?"

"She's fifty-five. I'm fifty-three. The ranch is hers. I come here from the Middle West. We wrote to each other first."

This is such a warmly human little story you'll never suspect, until you approach its exciting denouement, that there's a grimly terrifying ingredient at its very core—an ingredient as direly prophetic as the heat of vulture wings above a desert of no return. Perceptive indeed is the writing skill and psychological insight of Austin Roberts.

The sheriff looked up. "One of those lonely hearts' agencies?"

"Yes, Sheriff," said Mr. George.

"Was her life insured?"

"No, Sheriff. But I took out a ten thousand dollar life insurance policy as a wedding present for her," the little man said proudly. "I guess it was the thought that pleased her most. She told me in her letters she was pretty well off. But she was mighty pleased when I told her about the policy."

He hesitated. "The ranch was not as large as some I've seen, but that didn't make a gosh bit of difference to me. She's a fine woman—and a good cook."

The sheriff gave him a look of amused understanding. "Let's have her description," he said.

"She's a nice-looking, motherly woman . . . gray hair and dark eyes."

"Height?"

"She's taller than me by about four inches. That would make her five foot six. You know," he added confidentially, "I figured from the way she wrote about herself that she was a little thing. It was a surprise when she came up to me at the station."

The sheriff smiled. "How did you know each other?"

"By our clothes. She had on a blue dress and a blue hat. I wore a rose in my buttonhole."

"Where did you dig up a rose this time of year?" demanded the sheriff.

"It wasn't a real rose," explained Mr. George. "It was her idea. She must have got it off a hat. She sent it to me in the mail and told me to wear it."

The sheriff resumed his writing. "What's her weight?"

"I'll have to guess," said Mr. George. "She has a fine figure, a little heavy perhaps if you like women slim. I guess she'll go pretty close to two hundred pounds."

"When did she disappear?"

"Two days ago, on Wednesday morning. She'd planned to drive into San Diego to attend to some legal matters, and she told me if she should be late I wasn't to worry, because she'd take some sandwiches along.

"So I didn't worry until she didn't get back last night. I did not sleep a wink after that, and this morning I decided I'd better do something."

"Got a telephone?"

"No, Sheriff."

"Well if she had no way of getting in touch with you I wouldn't get excited," said the sheriff. "Nine times out of ten these women turn up okay."

"But she could have got a message to me through our neighbor," explained Mr. George. "The Tilson's have a phone."

"Maybe she didn't want to ask a favor."

"Well, that could be," conceded the little man. "Come to think of it, she chased the Tilson kids out of our yard early Wednesday morning."

"She has a temper, eh?" The sheriff smiled.

"No, I wouldn't say that. She's firm, if you know what I mean. But we never had an argument. The whole time we been married we never had an argument, and when I fell sick last week, she was as kind and gentle as an angel."

"I had a touch of the 'flu myself, last week," said the sheriff. "It laid me up for three days."

Mr. George was agreeably interested and listened to the sheriff's symptoms. When he had finished, Mr. George said, "I got it bad. Guess it was just too much rich food."

"Have a doctor?"

"No. My wife told me she used to be a nurse, and could take care of me all right. I could not have had finer care."

"We'll make a note of her being a nurse, just in case," said the sheriff. "Now, how was she dressed when she left?"

"She was wearin' a gray suit and a gray hat."

"What kind of a car was she driving?"

"Her black Ford sedan. It was an old one, but there were no birdies in it. Emma is mighty handy with tools."

The sheriff looked up. "The way I figure, you haven't anything to worry about. Your wife sounds like the kind of woman who can take care of herself."

Mr. George said, "I reckon you're right. But it's mighty hard to explain. I've had a feeling all along things was too good to last. You see, I haven't got a relative in the world, and this is the best home I ever had."

"Sure, I understand," said the sheriff. Then, as Mr. George lingered uncertainly, he asked: "You sure you told me everything? You didn't say anything to make her sore when she left?"

"Oh, no," the little man answered emphatically. "We never had a word between us. She's always thinking of me. Why, when she fixed lunches for both of us Tuesday night she put *more* in mine than she took for herself."

The sheriff looked at the little man intently.

Mr. George's eyes were misty. "It's things like that that shows what a fine woman she is. Of course, when I saw what she'd done, I exchanged the packages."

The sheriff got to his feet. "That was a ten-thousand-dollar policy you took out?" he asked.

"Yes." Mr. George smiled vaguely. "If you could only locate her."

"We'll find her. You got nothing to worry about there," said the sheriff. "Not after she ate that snack she fixed for you."

THE CASE OF THE Runaway Corpse
THE CASE OF THE Screaming Scarecrow
THE CASE OF THE Grinning Gorilla
THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD

Yes! You Get $15 Worth of New Mysteries At Once—FREE!

—Continued from Back Cover

WHAT a magnificent FEAST of reading for dyed-in-the-wool mystery fans! You get the VERY LATEST six mystery triumphs of Erle Stanley Gardner, the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"! Each is a *full size, full length* book, absolutely complete. A $15.00 value — but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club —the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview", which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail coupon promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE —the six complete Perry Mason mystery thrillers, described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L. I., New York

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE — **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

44

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

Walter J. Black, President RJ

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Perry Mason mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U. S. A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City.....Zone No. (if any).....State.....

FREE to MYSTERY FANS

As a New Membership Gift

ALL 6

OF THE LATEST *PERRY MASON* HITS BY

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

THE NO. 1 MYSTERY WRITER

Erle Stanley Gardner
THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD
THE CASE OF THE Runaway Corpse
THE CASE OF THE
the case of the Hesitant Hostess
THE CASE OF THE Grinning Gorilla
THE CASE OF THE Green-eyed Sister

All Six PERRY MASON Hits FREE—Including the Very Latest!

1 THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD

Mason's client is accused of stealing $40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of *MURDER!* Perry must save her from the chair—though he suspects she may be GUILTY!

2 THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband Ed. All Perry finds is — *blank* paper! The police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

3 THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

4 THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER

Grogan, a blackmailer, wants $20,000 for a piece of evidence against Fritch. Then Fritch is found DEAD! Grogan has an alibi—but not Mason!

5 THE CASE OF THE HESITANT HOSTESS

The *first* woman says she saw Perry's client at *the scene of the crime.* The *second* should not have appeared—but did. The *third*—Perry's star witness — *disappeared completely!*

6 THE CASE OF THE GRINNING GORILLA

Mason may never LIVE to solve this case! He faces a monstrous gorilla—*a long carving knife in its hairy hand!*

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

ROSLYN, L. I.

NEW YORK

—SEE OTHER SIDE